KNIGHT AT ARMS

H. C. BAILEY

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BARRY LEROY
THE HIGHWAYMAN
THE GAMESTERS
HIS SERENE HIGHNESS
CALL MR. FORTUNE
MR. FORTUNE'S PRACTICE

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

KNIGHT AT ARMS

BY

H. C. BAILEY

AUTHOR OF

"CALL MR. FORTUNE," "THE HIGHWAYMAN," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE HERITAGE OF ST. LO

"TO-DAY to you, to-morrow to me," said Silvain. "Keep me a place, lads." He put the rest of the sausage in his mouth and waved to his companions and strode off.

There were three of them hanging in the walnut tree. With a creak of ropes the bodies swayed to the wind and turned faces which had no eyes. Silvain went up the white road singing. It was the year of grace 1483.

He came back to France a large fair youth who carried his head high, having found no other fortune. He walked quick and light, with a singular grace as though he were poised to dash on or turn or spring aside. That distinguished him, that and the thrown-back head which seemed to look at a far horizon. The dust of November was grey upon his hose and his leather doublet. His only decoration was the dagger at his girdle.

Where the road turned to avoid the steep scarp of the chalk hills a man stood out to meet him and suddenly, so that they came chest to chest.

"Halt, fellow!" It was a raucous cry, with an oath and a scowl behind it.

"Why, so I do," Silvain said gently.

The man was armoured in helmet and coat of mail, he had a hand jerking at his sword. "In the King's

name, stand!" He worked his black brows. "Look you, fellow, there is a toll on all who pass this way for the mending of the bridge. It is an ordinance of the King. Ten sous, my gallant." He held out his left hand.

"Good faith, good master, I have crossed no bridge——" Silvain drew back.

"But you will cross it, fool."

"I hope so, indeed. If it please God." Silvain took off his cap. "But, alas, my master, I have no money."

"You lie, a base treacherous lie. What, you will cheat the King's officer? Open your scrip, boy."

Silvain spread empty hands. The man laughed. "Oh, you are a sack that must be slit," and out came the sword.

While Silvain seemed still drawing back he sprang in and the hilt of his dagger took the man between the eyes. The man went down and the sword flew. Silvain took that and before the man knew what was to do he found Silvain sitting on his chest unbuckling his sword belt.

"So, so!" Silvain put on the belt and kissed the sword blade and thrust it into the scabbard. "It shall lose no honour with me." He stood up and made a bow. "I have great pleasure that I met you, my lord."

"A robber," the man said, sitting up; "a rascal. But you are mad. Do you not see what I am? Look at my helmet,"—which had fallen off—"my brigandine" —he patted a coat of overlapping plates of steel, like a fish's scales—"the King's livery, boy. I am a franc archer. By St. Tringan, you have hanged yourself if the provost hear of you."

"Good master, you would not tell tales."

"Now the fiend burn your impudence!" The man thrust upon him again.

"Peace be with you, poor soul," said Silvain and pulled out the sword.

The man fell on his knees and held out his hands.

"Grace, my lord, I will spare your life. You are a free man from this hour." Silvain laughed and pulled him up. "By Our Lady of Vire, this is a hard world for honest folk," says he, making a grimace at his sword as it was sheathed again by Silvain's side.

"You are too good for it, brother," Silvain smiled. "Come, let us make it better."

The man drew back. "No, no. You have my sword. But I will fight for my coat. And I will die for my breeches."

"Brother, you shall have a sword on each side, by God's grace."

The man stared at him. "Now, who are you that smile like mother's milk and go about to earn hanging?"

"I am called Silvain de St. Lo, brother. And there is my life in your hand."

The man looked at him. "You are mad, or you lie. God pity you, my lord, I think you are mad."

"Have you anything to lose, brother?"

"One life only, my lord. And I love it well."

"So do I mine. But I have a castle and lands if I can win them."

"Peace, peace. I have a mansion in heaven if I can get there. But here I have a hole in the ground." He pointed up the steep hillside. "It is better. Come and see."

He took Silvain's arm and climbed fast. Silvain was propelled into a cave in the chalk. The mouth was concealed by bushes of juniper: it was so low that they bent double to go in, but beyond there was room enough and a comfortable smell of onions. "God bless you, brother," said Silvain. "No man has taken me to his home this long while."

"Since you come asking for a home underground, best have one you can get out of. Stand close and look." He pointed to the road below where four men were riding: they were lightly armed, but they bore

lance and shield. On their black breastplates was painted a red bull's head.

"They are of the Baron de Criquebœuf's household. What is that to me, brother? I do not challenge him."

"Said the hare of the fox. But once a young hare sought an old hare and bade him follow and drive the sheep from their good clover and take it and live fat, and while they talked of this there came by an old dog fox and had hare to his dinner."

"And so these hares are gone to ground," Silvain smiled.

"No wise man talks of what is his even though he has it not, while Criquebœuf's riders are near. And whatever you be, you are not a wise man, my lord." He pulled down onions from the string which hung above him and offered them to Silvain with a hunch of rye bread. "It is a hard world for good Christians. But there is a runlet of cider behind you. Breathe deep and put your mouth to the spigot and thank God for all."

"Health to you, brother!" Silvain drank. "Whoever you are, you are no churl."

"I? All Normandy knows me. I am Thibaut, the franc archer of Mère Eglise who keeps the road for honest folk. But what are you, my lord? That is the riddle, said the monkey to the man."

"Good faith, no riddle. I am my father's son. I am Silvain de St. Lo. What, you have heard how the King drove my father from St. Lo and gave it to a knight of Touraine. Then my father rode with the Duke of Burgundy and I was his squire. But he died in his bed, poor soul. He had no fortune ever. So this he left me, to win back the honour of St. Lo and the pride of the name. And now King Louis who despoiled us has gone down to hell, and here am I."

"Quoth the mouse to the new cat, as he came to her kitchen. What, would you trudge to St. Lo, one naked man, and pull Sir Arnaud out with your hands?"

"Not I, brother," Silvain smiled. "For I will go riding and in armour and——"

"And with a good sword!" Thibaut made a grimace. "Pray, my lord, did you pass a walnut tree on your way?"

"I saw the fruit. Have courage, brother. I do not die."

"But I do," said Thibaut. "Do you know what those pretty men did, messire? They made a noise when Criquebœuf took their land. He dies soon and dies hard who troubles the peace of the seigneurs."

Silvain smiled. "It may be that I shall find time to speak with M. de Criquebœuf," he said softly.

"Now St. Luke heal your poor head! Would you eat up every lord in Normandy?"

"Dear friend, I am no hungry man. No, faith, I would quarrel with none, now that King Louis is in hell, saving Sir Arnaud the Tourangeois who holds what is mine. For the rest, I do desire their good will and kindness."

"Do I not show it, then?" says Thibaut, rubbing his head where was sprung up a bruise the size of a plum.

"Nay, I have it here," Silvain touched the sword. "Brother, I stand your debtor. But see how I pay. Go, tell Sir Arnaud who has come against him that he may hang me in good time and pay you the butcher's price. Or ride with me and I will find you fortune. Choose, brother. You shall not say I left you poor."

"Now I know you are mad, my lord. For no man ever wanted me with him in all my days. By the sweet lips of Our Lady I will not deny you. It is the fools that Heaven loves, and if you lead and I come after there is folly enough to please all the saints."

"Amen, so be it," Silvain laughed.

Something in this manner Silvain and Thibaut set out to conquer the world. Whereat men wondered, then and after; for they said that Thibaut once ran from a scarecrow when it would not answer his challenge, and

none but Silvain ever thought him a man for a desperate venture. He was a long bag of bones, he looked a beggar of the highway with his stoop and his shuffle and the twists of that dark face which was never shaven nor bearded, he had a beggar's shrewd eye for men. Not the fellow, they said, to join in a boy's wild dash at fortune. And whether he ever knew Silvain in this world is doubted yet. But wherever they are, it is sure that Silvain has chosen to be with him. He would never be reasonable, Silvain of the far gaze.

There was a confusion of coming and going in France. Since King Louis, whom all men feared, was dead and a child reigned, some hurried to court, some to their castles to snatch new advantage. The highways were busy with men-at-arms seeking masters who would pay in cash or plunder, and knights in quest of fighting. Silvain and Thibaut going afoot were nothing accounted of on the Paris road, but when they came into Fleury Silvain stopped by the best inn. "This may serve for a night, brother," he said, looking lordly at the big fellows who lolled and drank.

"Are you made of money? It is silver there for a salt herring. Come, old Berthe the hen wife will give us a dish of chitterlings and clean straw and——"

Silvain strode into the inn saluting the men at their liquor graciously. "God bless your house, good man," says he to the landlord, who stood agape trying to reconcile his poor clothes with his manner. "Give us what you have and let it come quickly," and he sat himself down at the head of the table. The landlord began to talk. "Your best will serve, friend." Silvain waved his hand and pulled out a book of the life of Our Lady and began to look at the paintings in it. Thibaut slunk into the kitchen.

The food was a bowl of Caen tripe. At the smell of it the men-at-arms came boisterously to table. Silvain helped himself and pushed the bowl on. "Good appetite, friends," he smiled.

"Who set this puppet at the top of the table?" one of them cried, a lusty red fellow. Silvain, who was asking for a flask of white wine of Touraine, did not choose to hear. "I say, my lady's page, who gave you first dip?" He flung a pellet of bread.

"Why, friend, there is no first nor last here," says Silvain gently. "We are all equal at our meat."

"You whelp, do you count yourself as good as a man that bears arms?"

"But you lack courtesy. You would make me boast, good friend."

"Hear him! Boast quotha! Bark, puppy, and I'll whip you."

"My friend, I have heard enough of you. Fill your mouth and be still." He lifted his cup. "I wish you peace."

It did not arrive. The man started up in a splutter of oaths, while his friends mocked them both.

"Let him take the air till his head be cool," said Silvain, and went on eating.

The man came to him. "By my belly, it carries a sword!" he cried. "What is the iron for, child?"

Silvain drank up his wine and wiped his mouth. "Bear me witness, all here, it is not I who sought this." He stood up. "Mark me, fellow, if I fight, I fight for all I have against all of yours and no way else." He smiled. "Ah, now you are cooler."

"All of yours! A naked man afoot!" the man jeered.

Silvain put his hand to his neck and drew out a knight's chain of gold. "Naked am I, fellow? Come, take my life, and this is yours. What stake have you?"

One of his companions plucked the man's sleeve. "You ride blind, Bertrand, this is no cub." But he was shaken off. Bertrand had his eyes on the massy gold links.

"Body of God, I will match you for it, horse and mail and all."

"You have said." Silvain turned to the others: "Pray do us honour, friends. Lead on, messire." He waved Bertrand to the door.

Out in the cool evening wind they stood against each other. The red Bertrand settled his helmet and wetted his sword hand. He was a big fellow, but young enough to be swift, he had a black breastplate and beneath it a coat of chain mail hung guarding half his thighs. Silvain threw his cap away and tossed back his fair hair and looked to the little company of Bertrand's friends. "Give us the word, my lords." They clustered together muttering, laying wagers how soon Bertrand would get a stroke home, how many blows the youngling would stand.

"By St. Denis, it is no match. Give the child a helm, Bertrand," one of them cried.

"Good thanks, friend. Our match is made," Silvain smiled. "At your pleasure."

"He fights naked. He said it." Bertrand made his sword whistle.

"Fight then and win who can. Go!"

As the word was shouted Thibaut slunk out of the inn, huddled and cringing, gnawing a ham bone.

Bertrand stood fast, cutting figures in the air with his sword. Silvain moved round him and he swung on his heel and grinned. "Snap, puppy, snap," he said. Silvain made a feint at his face and as he came on guard sprang back and stooping to make the most of his reach swept a cut at the man's legs. Bertrand gave ground and beat the blade down and it glanced off the mail coat and along the thigh with no weight in the blow but scraping.

"Body of God, a hit, a hit!" one of the wagerers cried out.

"He has it!" Thibaut howled. "See his blood!"

"Go in, Bertrand," his fellows called. "Head of St. John, go in. Or he'll ride your horse yet."

And swearing, Bertrand went in. Stroke upon stroke

beat at Silvain's bare head. He took them on his sword, but it was only anvil to the hammer of Bertrand's blade, and the fury, the sheer weight of the blows bore him down: his knees bent, he stumbled. Then, while he seemed to fall, he sprang aside and was gone and Bertrand struck the air and staggered forward. As he went by Silvain rose to his full height and crashed a stroke on the unguarded helm. Bertrand met the ground breast and face, and where he fell he lay.

Silvain tossed back his hair and turned to the man's friends. "Is he down, my lords?" he said. He came to the still body and stood over it, his sword on the neck.

"A beaten man he is. Do not strike," one said. And another: "By my faith, you are a knight at arms."

Thibaut ran in and began to loose the man's breastplate. Silvain picked up the sword and tried its balance. "It is worth a better man," he said. "Take it, friend," and he laid it to Thibaut's hand. "Nay, leave him his helm and his coat. I would flay no man." He put on the black breastplate, he took the purse from the man's belt and weighed it in his hand. "His horse should be heavier," he smiled and turned away.

"By my faith, you find fortune easily," a man growled.

"Why, so I do," Silvain smiled. "Would you do so, friend?" But none of them challenged him. "And fortune I find for all that follow me. Go, look to your fellow. He is a brave man of his hands. And when he asks what struck him, tell him that it was one Silvain, a lonely man. God be with you, my children. Who would ride with me, may find me to-morrow about this time at the cross of Hectomarre." He went into the inn calling to the landlord. "Good fellow, there is here a man who has done himself a hurt. Care for him well." He felt in Bertrand's purse. "Here is money for him. Let him lack nothing."

" 'And whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come

again I will repay you,'" Thibaut whined. "That is scripture, fellow. And my master's name is Sir Silvain the Samaritan."

Then they went out and saddled Bertrand's horse and Silvain rode away with Thibaut trudging at his stirrup. But Thibaut looked often behind him. "Have done with that, brother!" Silvain turned the head round. "A man who looks over his shoulder I cannot live with."

"Nor without, my lord, in your trade. When these honest fellows think of it, they may seek to win your winnings again."

"They may, and therefore we vanish, lest they be tempted against their strength. But I believe they will not. For I gave them hope to feed on."

Thibaut chuckled. "And if they go to the cross of Hectomarre they will find neither breastplate nor horse. Hope is a good servant and a bad master, as the wench said when she took the man's presents and married his friend."

"Rogue, I make no tryst to break it. If they seek me, they will find me."

Thibaut drew off. Thibaut bowed low. "My lord, I have done you a wrong," he said. "I began to think you were not mad."

"Then you began to come to your senses. Good faith, there is no madness in me. I am as cold and cunning as King Louis. I have my kingdom to make. I know what I want and I count what I do."

"Oh, you see far, you see far!" Thibaut looked up at him. "Do you see near?"

"I see bed and fodder. Come, it is time. There is work for to-morrow."

He turned his horse into a beech wood and rode on through the gloom to the shimmer of twilight in a glade where there was grass for the horse. There on the beech leaves he said his prayers and slept. And Thibaut watched him a while and stole off to rob a hen roost.

When they had made a breakfast of roast eggs they took the road again. "Whither now, my fair lord?" says Thibaut. "To the field where the rainbow ends?"

"To the land of fair honour, brother."

Thibaut twisted his face. "Will there be any more purses on the road?" he said, but said it to himself, Silvain looked so noble a master against the morning sun.

And as the day went by he was the more puzzled. The road had many travellers. Still, now that Silvain was on horseback he could hold his own among them, but he was meek: he let himself be thrust into the ruts, he stared at knights and men-at-arms like a wondering boy, and having gone some way he halted and turned and rode back. When this was done yet again Thibaut came to him with tongue hanging out. "Please you, my lord, I have no tail," he said. "Therefore I take no pleasure to run after it. I grow dizzy with all this turning."

"Then lie down and scratch, friend. I know what I do."

Upon the third return, they met a knight and his squire riding abreast at a round pace. The squire carried the lance and shield, the knight had his helmet at the saddle, but he was a glitter of steel from neck to toe, in plates that overlapped and roundels, nobly armoured. He rode a big Norman charger and needed it, for he sat tall in the saddle and yet had length of leg like Silvain. He took the crown of the causeway as by right, but so did Silvain, and when the squire shouted him out of the way spurred his horse. The squire checked to draw aside lest his master should be jostled, and Silvain, heavier man on heavier horse, crashed into him, and flinging squire upon knight sent both reeling in disorder off the road.

"By my faith, you are no gentle horsemen." Silvain reined up to watch them, hand on hip. "Hard heel will not mend heavy hand, messire."

"Go, beat me the knave, Henriot," the knight cried.

"Oh, a wise knight. He fights by proxy," Silvain laughed. "Come, child, and be his whipping boy," and he drew his sword.

"Bones of St. Denis, give me the lance." The knight turned and set his horse going to ride Silvain down.

"Good faith, here is a knightly deed. A brave knight, oh and a wise knight," Silvain said, but he too charged.

The lance was aimed at his breast. He made his horse swerve from the point and when it slid by him, turned inward again, rose in his stirrups and struck a back-hand blow. It came upon the knight's head while he went by unsteady from his missed charge and beat him from the saddle sideways heels over head.

Silvain leapt down upon him, but he was in no haste to be up. Blood was coming from his mouth and his nose and he raised himself on his elbow and groaned, looked dully about him.

The squire cried out his horror and rode at Silvain, but was encumbered by Thibaut who clung to him, leg and sword arm, and pulled him out of the saddle and rolled with him in the dust.

"The boy is a good boy," Silvain smiled. "But I think this fight is fought. How say you, sir?" He put his point to the man's neck. "Do you yield yourself?"

"To a nameless man? Not I, by my faith."

"It is well said. You will die then?"

The knight dashed the blood from his face. "Do your pleasure," he said sullenly.

"You choose well." Silvain lowered his point. "Oh, sir, be content. You have lost no honour this day. I am Silvain de St. Lo."

After a moment the knight cried out, "By the blood of St. John, it cannot be."

"What is, is," Silvain smiled. "And you, who blazon

the golden stag of Morson, I think you may yield to the lord of St. Lo."

"I am Artus de Morson," the man scowled at him and then with an oath looked all ways for help. There was no help in his squire. The lank Thibaut had wound himself about the lad's body and disarmed him and was mounted on his horse catching the other two. The road was empty else. "I yield myself," he muttered.

Silvain put up his sword. "I must hold you to ransom, Sir Artus."

"By my faith, you will be paid," Sir Artus cried. "I ride with Monseigneur de Criquebœuf. He will do me right."

"What, is he still alive? But you shall not need him. You shall go free for your arms and your horse. Pray you, let your squire serve you."

Then Silvain put on his armour as it was stripped from him and took his lance and his shield and mounted his horse, and with Thibaut wearing the breastplate and riding the horse of the first fight, they made speed. And after them followed slowly Sir Artus on his squire's horse and the squire afoot.

But Thibaut shook his dark head. "Good, my lord, you are too fast for me, as the slug said when the osterpillar bade him be a butterfly. You went naked and afoot yesterday and by night you were a man-at-arms, and to-day you ride a knight. St. Tringan watch over me, what will you be to-morrow?"

"Myself, friend."

"Pray you, will you know yourself when you find yourself?"

"What, man, do you fear for me? I shall not fail my fortune." They rode on and Silvain was busy scraping the stag's head from the shield of Sir Artus.

"Aye," says Thibaut, "but you will not wipe him out so. He has taken his grudge down the road to Criquebœuf."

"You will look over your shoulder, will you?" Sil-

vain poked his knife into the man's arm. "Nay, God speed him, I have a mind to speak with M. de Criquebœuf."

Thibaut grimaced, wriggling his arm. "If I look behind, do you look before," he said. "Whither are we going, my lord, that we go so gay?"

"Why, to the cross of Hectomarre," Silvain laughed.

"Oh, Mary our Mother!" Thibaut groaned. "It is a wild life with you, as the hen said to the fox when he ran with her into a trap." And the nearer they came to Hectomarre the farther he fell behind.

The men-at-arms had taken up the challenge. They guarded the cross roads on either side, two of them mounted on watch, the others lying by their horses. But when Silvain came riding alone, in a knight's armour, his face hidden in his helmet, they did not know him and let him go by. He turned then, he put up his vizor: "Are we all here?" he smiled.

There was shouting. "By my bones, he has come! It is the lad of the inn. Who the devil is your armourer?" And they got to horse, drawing up against him.

Silvain counted them off with his gauntleted hand, one, two, up to eight. "A good company, by the grace of God. How say you of me?"

"Let us come to it," one cried, and another, "It is not only you that can strip a man."

"Surely no," Silvain smiled. "Eight upon one should do it, though some go down. Forward then. Who comes first?"

No man was eager to lead. They muttered among themselves till one swore: "By the head of St. John, he has kept his tryst. He did not bid us here to flay him. What have you for us, my lord, that you come to seek us."

"Why, now you speak like men. I have a rich adventure. I am Silvain de St. Lo and I ride to win my heritage. If you ride with me you shall have gallant

work to do and win fair fortune. Who lays his life on mine?"

"By St. Denis, it is I will venture," one man cried. "I like your luck, my lord." And another said, "What is to do then? There is a King's man in St. Lo."

"And the King is dead. Sir Arnaud de Fontaines is lord of my lands and holds my castle of St. Lo. I go to reason with him. Thus we go. To-morrow in the evening I come to the castle a traveller benighted and ask a night's lodging. So do you all, but one by one and each long after other. And when we are in I will speak with Sir Arnaud and by the grace of God I will show him that his King is dead." He bared his hand and held it out. "Who is man of mine?" There was not one but took it. "Forward, then! Go each his own way."

"To the devil," said a sepulchral voice behind him as they rode off. Thibaut came up in the shadows. "This will be a merry meeting, as the old carp said when he saw the dragnet coming down the pond."

"Go, hide in your hole then. I take no man against his will."

"Do you not?" Thibaut twisted his mouth. "I come. I come. And God He knows I fear."

CHAPTER II

ENTRY OF MONSEIGNEUR DE CRIQUEBŒUF

THE castle of St. Lo stood alone on a hill of sand and sandstone, as though the hill itself rose into brown turrets, which in the gloaming mingled with the sky. Riding through the little cluster of houses at the foot, where the herdsmen and ploughmen of the seigneur lodged, Silvain and Thibaut climbed the steep to the main gate. There on the iron-barred oak hung a horn and Thibaut blew a blast. They were challenged from the gate-house tower, they declared themselves and were let in. There was no lack of courtesy, but the lord of St. Lo seemed to live humbly. Thibaut must look to the horses himself. When Silvain came to the hall he found no one in it and the tables bare and a dying fire. His men coming in one by one stared hard and made long faces. They kept to their orders, they would not know one another or Silvain, but with a grin at him, "Here is poor cheer, sir knight," one said.

"Friend, you are churlish," says Silvain gently. "Blame no man's meat till you have eaten it."

"As the forester said when the wolf went round the meat in the trap," Thibaut muttered.

But then began a scurry as though the seneschal had but just thought of supper, and soon there was meat and drink enough. An old steward in a black gown and a silver chain came in and led Silvain to a seat at the high table and sat the others below the salt, and a dozen men-at-arms clattered in to join them and a press of servants. Still there was room to spare, and at the high table Silvain sat alone. The steward carved for him. "Why, good friend, let me wait for your lord

and his lady." The steward said that monseigneur was abroad and Dame Alys kept her bower. "By my faith, I am an unlucky guest." The steward must endeavour that he should not think so, and indeed was excellently hospitable, but a silent man.

Silvain watching the lower table saw some constraint there too. His men were plied with food and drink, but they made nothing of talking. The retainers of Sir Arnaud had thoughts of their own and they finished their supper in quick time, nor stayed for drinking. Silvain was left with his own men and they looked at him queerly. "No more wine, my lord?" the old steward hovered over him.

Silvain stood up. "You have made me too welcome, friend. No more this night. I hope I may drink a cup with your lord in the morning." The steward said nothing. He bowed and took candles and led the way out. "Good rest, good fellows," Silvain called to his men.

For Silvain, who came as a knight, there was a room to sleep in. His men lay down in the hall. After a while to that little turret room came Thibaut, wriggling his long body: "What do you know, my lord?" he grinned. "For no man else knows anything. This is true that they say, Sir Arnaud is not in the castle. He rode out in the morning and his good wife watches for him and he does not come. What is to do?"

"Sleep, brother," Silvain said. "Sleep while you may. For I see a long waking," and he fell asleep, while Thibaut muttered and tossed on the floor by his side.

When the sun cast a bar of light through the narrow window Silvain awoke and said his prayers and put on his armour. Through the clank of it came the blast of a horn. He thrust Thibaut aside and ran to the battlements.

At the foot of the hill was halted a company of men-at-arms, others were climbing to the castle, there were

some three or four at the gate. "By my faith, it is the red bull's head," Silvain laughed and ran along the wall.

From the gate-house tower the watch challenged, "Who comes to St. Lo?"

"The Baron de Criquebœuf is here. Open your gate."

There was no answer. But Silvain heard a medley of voices and hurrying feet. A woman came out upon the ramparts by the gate. He saw her face white in the sunshine. "What do you seek at St. Lo, my lord?" she cried.

A little man moved apart from the others below and looked up and laughed. "Ha, Dame Alys, are you waking so early? Why, it was a lonely night for you. Open to me. I have news of your sweet master."

"Send your men down the hill, my lord, and the gate shall open for you."

"No, pretty one. It opens for me and all of mine. Who denies me? There is no lord in St. Lo. I have Sir Arnaud fast in my hold. What, would you kill your true love? Open your gates to me or he dies for it. By the head of God, if I fight my way in I will not spare him, no, nor your own fair body, nor any flesh in St. Lo."

"And I—I will hold my lord's castle against you and all your power."

"Then Sir Arnaud has seen his last of light."

"I will hold for his honour till I die."

"Odo de Criquebœuf," Silvain called in his gentle voice. "Messire Odo!" he leaned over the battlements, his fair hair blowing in the wind. "Alas, I must tell you that you lie. The lord of St. Lo is not in Criquebœuf. He is here, by God's grace."

The lady turned and shaded her eyes to look at him, and Criquebœuf ran aside to see him better.

"Yes, look well! There is a lord in St. Lo, for I am he. I am Silvain de St. Lo, messire. It is in my

mind that you have done a fool's deed, little man, and a base folly. I do not like you upon my hill." He ran along the wall and took an arbalest from a man-at-arms and loosed the bolt at Criquebœuf. It struck that little lord full, but he was in armour of proof and though he staggered he went safe off, shouting to his men below.

Dame Alys also was calling. "Bring me that knight! Who watches on the eastern wall? Bring me that knight, I say."

But Silvain was away before they could lay hands on him, and he came to her and bowed low. She stood tall with her dark hair tied in a crescent above her head and her flowing blue robe was borne back by the wind on a noble form. The white face was stern and proud in her fear.

"Who are you that mock my lord? What brought you here in this hour?"

"I am what I say I am, Silvain de St. Lo. I am come for my own. This hour I did not choose, but I am glad that it has found me here, lady."

"If you are Silvain de St. Lo you are a banished man. By Our Lady, you shall win nothing by this trick. If my lord were here he would send you in chains to the King."

Silvain smiled at her. "When he is here, he shall do his endeavour. But this day the road is barred. Look, lady." Criquebœuf's men were marching afoot up the hill.

"It is you that have done this," she cried. "You have given my lord to death."

"Not I, by my faith. I think I have won his life. Messire de Criquebœuf will not kill him hastily while another man is lord in St. Lo." She was startled. "Dame Alys, we trifle with the time. The little man will kill us all if we stay quarrelling. Come, I put my hands between your hands. I will be your true servant till we are quit of Criquebœuf. Ah, you may trust me. My honour is the honour of St. Lo."

She looked at him strangely. A child's voice called her "Mother, mother," a little girl stumbled up the winding stair, saw him and hid her face in Dame Alys's gown.

Silvain took the child's hand and kissed it and ran off calling to Thibaut and his men. He led them to the gate-house tower where already the old steward had gathered most of the castle's men, a gloomy company. For a score of their fellows had ridden out with Sir Arnaud and must be broken. And they had no hope of better fortune, so few they were to hold off Criquebœuf's power. Silvain came to them boisterously. "Good faith, the little man shall dance this day! And a merry measure. The Lord is a man of war, but not so the lord of Criquebœuf. Come up, little man, come up and we will show you a thing. By the bones of St. Denis, we could hold out here against all the power of Normandy. And he brings us a tail of a poor hundred. His tail will be down this night." While he talked he was posting men with arbalests here and there, sending others for more bolts, for stones, for wood and water.

Criquebœuf's men toiled up the hill in close column, for the path was narrow. "Shoot roundly together, brothers," Silvain cried. "Shoot high." The volley of bolts was loosed and struck gaps in the array, for the men-at-arms had no vizors to their helmets and only the front ranks bore shields and not every breastplate was proof. Still they pressed on, and though the arbalests were swiftly worked and took more toll, to the walls they came. Then holding their shields above their heads to make an iron roof the front ranks began to batter at the gate.

Silvain and his men flung down stones upon them and broke up their roof and drove them back and they lay down on the hill-side while their fellows climbed about the rocky base of the castle wall looking for some weak place. None they found, and the storming party

formed again and came at the gate with their axes. Then Silvain poured down upon the roof of shields cauldrons of boiling water and that assault was broken into a wild flight down the hill.

Then M. de Criquebœuf was seen a furious little man and his voice rose and fell. He set them in some order and marched them off, and Silvain's men sent a cheer after him and crowded down the winding stair calling for dinner. But the old steward looked at Silvain: "The end of this is not yet, my lord," he said.

"I abide to the end," said Silvain. "Go down. I keep watch in St. Lo."

So he was left alone on the tower, and while he watched there came to him a woman with a pasty on a silver dish and a flagon of Touraine wine. "This from my lady, sir knight."

"I kiss her hands and her feet," Silvain said, but while he ate his eyes searched into the cluster of houses under the hill.

In a while he saw muster and movement and shouted, "On guard, on guard," and his men came up merrily. But Criquebœuf had a new tactic. Half-way up the path his front ranks opened out and spread along the hill-side and it was seen they were bowmen. So they worked their way up, scattered, offering no good mark, till they wound their arbalests and shot wherever they saw head or body.

While this storm of bolts searched the walls, other men brought forward ladders here and there and set them up. Silvain must needs scatter his main guard and they ran where danger was, casting the ladders off, and once or twice beating down men who had made a lodgment. The fight went hard for the cross-bow bolts found them as they ran along the walls, and though they made far greater havoc of the storming parties, they could spare none of their side, and Criquebœuf's men came on doggedly again and again. And when the day was waning and they were scattered and weary

Criquebœuf brought his shields up the hill at a run. The axes were beating on the gate before Silvain won back to the tower. He hurled down stones and broke the guard of shields, still those who were left plied their axes. His men came back in time to bring the boiling cauldrons and again the assault fled writhing and cursing. But in that moment he heard a cry for help. Away on the western wall where the hill was steepest, where no attack had been, Criquebœuf's men had a ladder up and already they were on the rampart. A blue sleeve waved wildly from a turret, Dame Alys cried his name.

"Forward, forward! It is the sword's turn now," he cried and charged along the wall. The rush of his coming bore him into the midst of the black breastplates. One man went down into the castle yard, another out upon the hill-side. Blow upon blow he cleared a space about him and fought his way to the ladder. It was dark with men, and others were running up the hill-side to climb, and at the foot Criquebœuf was yelling for more ladders. Silvain caught at the top rungs and heaved: he could not stir it so heavy it was with men; it shook and cracked and the topmost man cut at his hands. Still he laboured with it, moved it a little way, thrust it out and suddenly the weight upon it helped him and bore it away and ladder and men went crashing down the hill-side. He staggered back panting and snatched his sword again. But there was no need. His men had dealt with those who were on the wall.

He heard Criquebœuf's thin voice calling for another assault, saw him rush hither and thither pulling and striking men who would not be rallied. The broken array flowed down the hill in many streams.

But on the walls of the castle they were merry. "Ha, little man, have you had your fill?" one cried, and another, "We have a knight to our captain, we."

"That is a true word, my lord," the old steward said, coming to Silvain's side. "Have you no hurt?" Silvain

shook his head. His eyes were searching the retreat. "We may thank God."

"So ends this day," Thibaut said. "But there is another to-morrow. Let us eat, drink, and be merry."

"Give them good cheer, friend," Silvain said. "Go down, go down." But he still stood looking through the twilight.

Thibaut lingered by him. "What do you lack, my lord?"

"I keep the first watch. Go, find me a cloak, friend." And he stayed there watching till the night was dark.

When he went into the hall he found Dame Alys in her place at the high table. "This is kind honour, lady," he bowed.

"I think my lord would bid me be here," she said, and her eyes met his sternly. A sedulous care for his needs, a cold dignity proclaimed that he was only a guest and of no account. Silvain was frugal and quick.

A while after, when he had made the rounds, he went out at the postern gate alone. He was swathed in his cloak, but he moved lightly, for he wore no armour, and coming round the hill picked his way about the bivouac of Criquebœuf's men and into the little village. From house to house he stole in the dark till he made sure of that one which he sought. Then he drew off and struck light in a tinder box, covering it with his cloak. Choosing that of the new stacks which was nearest the house he tore sheaves from it and put them nearer still and set all on fire. White smoke rose and flame and the wattled walls began to smoulder, there was crying within and a little man ran out. Him Silvain struck down and muffling him in the cloak flung him over his shoulder and made off where the dark was darker for the glare of the fire.

In this manner Monseigneur de Criquebœuf entered the castle of St. Lo.

CHAPTER III

THE LORD OF ST. LO

THE old steward held the postern open. Silvain flung the little man in, since there was no room for two in the narrow doorway, and followed and set his foot upon him and breathed hard and dashed the sweat from his face. "God's grace, my lord, what is this you bring?" the old man held his lantern high. Criquebœuf had wriggled his head out of the cloak and looked up at them through dishevelled hair, an anxious man.

"Aye, sir," Silvain said. "What are you that lie there?"

"I am Odo de Criquebœuf. You know it well."

"Indeed I had thought of it. Pray you, Sir Odo, what have you to do here in our castle of St. Lo?"

"I am your prisoner this night."

Silvain took his foot from the little man's chest and bowed. "Sir, it is my great good fortune. I shall study to deserve it. Pray you, let me lead you to Dame Alys. Go before, friend." He turned to the steward: "Say to my lady that Sir Odo de Criquebœuf craves her grace."

Criquebœuf, having found his feet and made sure that all of him was still hale, smiled at him. "You are gallant, sir," and followed the lantern. He conceived that he understood the matter.

They had to wait at my lady's door. When she called them in she had put on a loose golden gown, and in a plait on either side her black hair came upon it to fall across her bosom.

"Dame Alys, I bring you Monseigneur de Crique-

bœuf, who is prisoner in St. Lo——" Silvain began, but she would not hear him out.

She came at Criquebœuf, crying, "What grace should you have? What mercy? Where is my lord?" It became clear to Criquebœuf that he had mistaken her.

Silvain came between them. "This knight has yielded himself," he said gently.

"He shall yield me my lord alive or he shall hang. Speak, fellow! He dares not speak! How is it with my lord? Speak true, lies shall not help you now."

"But let me speak then," the little man smiled. "It is with Sir Arnaud as it is with me. He lies a prisoner in Criquebœuf as I in St. Lo and has no more hurt than I. But there is this of my part, I have your castle beleaguered and I think you have no men before Criquebœuf."

"I pray you, my lord, do you count your men will have better fortune without you?" said Silvain gently. "For it is in my mind that with you they have had none."

Criquebœuf turned on him. "Why, sir, I count that if my men see me not in the morning, it will go very hard with Sir Arnaud."

"Alas, I have a dull wit," Silvain sighed. "I cannot tell how that shall serve you. For what ransom will you pay then, my lord?"

"His life for it," Dame Alys cried.

"Surely his life for it," said Silvain gently. "Yet what is that worth?"

"By St. Ouen, speak one of you, not both. Who is it that talks with me? I am your prisoner, sir. What would you have of me?"

"By my faith, I would have a knight's ransom. Five hundred gold crowns is all too little for the lord of Criquebœuf."

That lord made a wry face. "I must strip myself bare."

"I dare not hold you cheap, my lord," Silvain bowed.

"Well, let me write." He made for the table.

"Not so." Dame Alys thrust him back and turned upon Silvain. "Out on you, you are false. You sell my lord's life."

Criquebœuf laughed. "He has spoken, and as I think he is lord in St. Lo."

"Not while I live or child of mine."

"Why, he may contrive for that, lady."

"Pray you write, my lord." Silvain set pen and paper. "Five hundred gold crowns and Sir Arnaud safe at the castle gate."

Criquebœuf drew back: "God's body, it is a cheat. I will not write. The ransom, yes, not the man too."

"It is indeed yours to choose," said Silvain. "What is the man to me? If he live or die I am lord in St. Lo. And whether you die or live I will hold what is mine. Yet if you would live, my lord, write."

And Criquebœuf sat and wrote while Silvain looked over the paper and prompted in his gentle voice. But when it was written and before it was sealed Dame Alys snatched the paper and read. Then she tossed it down on the table and looked long at Silvain and swept out.

In the morning M. de Criquebœuf was brought from the dungeon beneath the hall and set upon the ramparts and a trumpet called to his men. When some one came running up the hill, "Monseigneur is here," Silvain shouted. "Look well!" They did look and cried the news, and the rest hurried to see, while Criquebœuf swore at them and bade them send his squire to the gate. "His squire alone," Silvain called, "no man else."

"You are a cautious knight," Criquebœuf grinned at him.

"Oh, sir, I do not love to take life," said Silvain.

They went down to the gate and opened a wicket in it and when the squire came, a swart youth and heated, and saw Criquebœuf he cried out, "Good, my lord, have

you no hurt? I have men digging in the ashes yet. I——"

"You are a fool. Take this and ride to the castle and bid Roger do it and fail not."

"And the men, my lord?"

"The men rest here on their arms. Go."

"Haste, friend, haste," said Silvain. "You ride for your lord's life."

The squire looked into his keen eyes and fled.

"By St. Ouen, you are anxious," Criquebœuf smiled.

"Why, sir, so I am. There is one in this castle will not spare you long," Silvain said, and took him back to the dungeon under the hall.

Silvain was a great man to his men that day. They counted the ransom of M. de Criquebœuf many times over and saw themselves serving a captain born for fortune. If he could contrive such a victory coming a lone knight, what would he find for them when he was lord of St. Lo? But Dame Alys walked the walls apart.

It was late when she saw dust on the road in the west and stood at gaze and called the steward to her and pointed and talked to him eagerly, looking askance at Silvain. But Silvain had seen all before she saw it, and his men were already saddling in the courtyard, and to the gate-house tower he came with Thibaut carrying his helmet.

A trumpet sounded under the hill. Silvain shouted in answer: "Bring what you bring to the turn of the path that I may see it." Into sight came a little company, a man unarmed between two men-at-arms and Criquebœuf's squire who bore a leather sack and behind them Criquebœuf's men gathered. "Is that your lord, friend?" Silvain asked of one of the watch.

"It is he, good faith."

Then Silvain shouted: "Halt there and see what I bring," and he put on his helmet and ran down, bidding Thibaut follow.

"Now God give you grace, my lord, what is there for a sane man to do here?" Thibaut groaned.

"To count the gold, brother," Silvain laughed and sent for Criquebœuf.

That little lord came blithely to the gate: "You are still lord in St. Lo then?" he grinned.

"By your favour. And there is your ransom." He opened the wicket. "If it please you, let your squire come bringing the man and the gold to the thorn bush there, and you and I and my squire will go meet them."

Criquebœuf looked out. "It is three upon two," he said. "Well, I trust your honour," and he shouted the order to his men.

Then Silvain opened the gate and they three went out. "Here is your ransom, Sir Arnaud," Silvain said, looking the man in the eye.

"Who are you, in God's name?"

Criquebœuf laughed. "Why, this is the lord of St. Lo."

"Silvain de St. Lo, I am."

"What devil's trick is this, Criquebœuf?" Sir Arnaud laid hands on him.

"Peace, peace. We are naked men, both. Trick, by St. Ouen? No trick of mine that I pay five hundred crowns for it. Give him his gold, boy." The squire gave the bag to Silvain, who broke the seal and saw that there was gold and turned aside to Thibaut.

Sir Arnaud looked death at him.

Criquebœuf smiled. "Pray give us leave, Messire Silvain. For I think we are not your prisoners now." He drew Sir Arnaud apart. "Good faith, I cannot tell what he is. This only I know that when I came to St. Lo to try this venture against you, the fellow was in your castle with your lady and gave out that he was the lord of St. Lo. And by St. Ouen, true I found it, for he ruled all and served your lady well and she him with good will."

"Now I know that you lie, Criquebœuf."

"By Our Lady of Evreux, it is true. Peace, man. Look, you find him master of all." He drew Sir Arnaud farther away down the hill. "And last night when he took me by a trick, oh, he is a strong man of his hands, he brought me to the castle and carried me up to your lady's chamber where she waited him in her bedgown and they two—— Why, man, what should I gain by a lie? You shall find all the castle know of it when you go in."

"You are a very foul knave, Criquebœuf," Sir Arnaud turned away.

Criquebœuf held up his hand and cried, "Bows bows!" and ran.

From the foot of the hill his arbalests shot a flight of bolts. Silvain dashed after him, caught him and carrying him like a sack came close behind Sir Arnaud: "Stoop low, sir, stoop low, and forward, in God's name."

Criquebœuf's squire made at them, crying, "Treachery, treachery!"

"Why, brother, so it is," Thibaut said and clung to his legs and brought him down and picked up the gold and ran.

So shielded by a man's body and a man in armour Sir Arnaud came through the cross-bow bolts back to his castle. There at the gate Silvain flung M. de Criquebœuf down and he did not rise again, for he was shot through body and neck, a dying man. But Silvain ran on to his horse and mounted and crying, "Out! Out!" charged down the hill at the head of his men.

The arbalests shot while they came, but would not wait the shock, and the men-at-arms behind them, taken unready and in disorder, were broken and ridden down, and through the twilight Silvain's company chased them far.

He came back, leading merry men. The castle gate opened to him and the old steward met him and said,

"Sir, my lord and my lady ask that you will honour them." Silvain took off his helmet and was brought to Dame Alys's bower.

She sat beside her husband and her hand was on his. "I pray you be happy, lady," he said. "The riders of Criquebœuf will trouble St. Lo no more."

"By the blood of God you are a brave knight and wise at arms," Sir Arnaud cried.

But Dame Alys looked full on Silvain, and though her face was grown gentle her eyes were cold. "Why have you done all this?" she said.

"So it fell, lady, and I could do no other."

"For the honour of St. Lo?"

"You have said."

Her eyes were darker and she breathed deep. Then Sir Arnaud said slowly: "Sir, it is in my heart that I have done you a great wrong."

But Silvain laughed. "Good faith, my lord, your heart does not love me and I have no blame for it, I——"

"You have saved my life and what I would love better, and I——"

"It was my fortune."

"I pray you, sir," Dame Alys held out her hands to him, "why did you come to St. Lo?"

"I am Silvain de St. Lo."

"And I hold what was your father's," Sir Arnaud said, "and you came to win it again. And now you win my life for me and my wife and my child. Yes, you fight your fight nobly, my lord."

"By the heart of Our Lady, I have done as I could," Silvain cried. "What would you have of me?"

"What would we have?" Dame Alys echoed with wonder glowing in her eyes.

"God's body, I am no churl," Sir Arnaud said. "What should a man give for life and love and honour? You have won all. It is you are lord in St. Lo."

Then Silvain smiled. "Not I, by my father's soul.

Hear me, Sir Arnaud. I came to set myself against you, and so I have, and I go down this day. For you are a better knight than I. I came to win lands and fortune, but you hold honour dearer than fortune and lands. I came to take by arms, but you would give all away for the pride of your soul. By my faith, I cannot stand against you, my lord. I must draw off and go my way. The honour of St. Lo is safer in your guard than mine."

He strode out before they could stay him and came to Thibaut where he sat in that little room in the eastern wall. Master Thibaut had his hands deep in the gold and was talking to it. "Come, brother, carry that now to Sir Arnaud," Silvain said.

Thibaut's dark face twisted in strange devices. He lifted a handful of gold and let it trickle back and kissed it. "Fare you well," he said. "You go to a man that has wife and child." He did up the bag. "Good my lord madness, it is a cruel world for bachelors. The fathers, they have no mercy upon us."

Silvain marched him back to Sir Arnaud and Dame Alys, who were deep in talk. "Here is Criquebœuf's ransom, my lord. I pray you of your grace spare something of it for those good fellows who came with me. They have fought not ill. And if you need men in St. Lo——"

Sir Arnaud thrust the bag away. "This is none of mine, sir. Why, what would you make me, that you would have me take that too?"

"Oh, sir, if it irks you, my fellows will ease you," Silvain smiled, and out he went.

He called his men about him where they sat drinking in the hall. "Good fellows, I promised you a blithe adventure and fortune to win. We have been merry here in St. Lo and Sir Arnaud has no grudging hand."

"Sir Arnaud!" one of them said. "Who is lord in St. Lo?" And another: "You were to win castle and lands. God's body, you have won all this day." And

another: "By my bones, you promised us service with the lord of St. Lo."

"If you ask, Sir Arnaud will not deny you, and he is lord of St. Lo. But I go my way. Who follows me?"

"What, you give all up?" one cried, and another: "The old lord has bought him off." And another: "What, follow a landless knight?"

Silvain turned from them and in the courtyard met Sir Arnaud seeking him. "My men have chosen, sir," Silvain said before he could speak. "I pray your grace for them. They fight well and are trusty on a hard day. Give me leave now, it grows late."

"Good faith, man, you will not end it so? You——"

"Oh, my lord, I have no comfort to be here in St. Lo," Silvain said. "Forgive me when I am gone," and he found his horse and mounted and rode out alone.

A little way down the hill he turned and looked back a last time through the gloaming at the castle of his name. He saw a woman stand on the walls watching him, and a child.

Then Thibaut rode out after him. "What, brother, you follow a man that has lost?" Silvain said gently.

And Thibaut groaned, "Alas, my lord, and, alas, for this I was born, as the donkey said when he heard his voice."

CHAPTER IV

OLD RED CLEMENT

SO it befell that Silvain the knight and Thibaut the squire sought fortune together. In that year the boy who was king in France kept court under his sister's hand at Langeais on the Loire, and there all went who sought redress of old wrongs or claimed new rights or had a sword to sell. And these two also debated whether they would turn that way. "I like it very well, my lord," said Thibaut. "Where thieves are falling out is the place for me. Where men seek justice of a woman and a child is surely the place for you."

"Justice, brother?" Silvain laughed. "God deliver me from justice in this world and the next."

"Alas, my master, I think He will," said Thibaut.

But to that child's court they did not come in many days. For their road took them close upon the frontier of Brittany, where a Duke reigned who was something mad and nothing of a friend to France.

The apple-trees grew among the cornfields there, long ranks across the stubble ruddy and golden. What first disturbed Silvain, who saw far, was a commotion in the branches. Then in the bare fields people were running, little shapes like chickens running to cover from a hawk. Riding on down the easy hill he heard a noise of steel, he met men-at-arms damaged and in a hurry. "You go the wrong way, my children," he said. "Your honour is behind you." They checked and stared while he rode by, they did not follow him. Where the road wound about to ford a brook in a copse he saw the fight, horses down in the mire and a

muddle of men on horseback. He made out in the midst a knight dismounted who stood at bay with one or two guarding his back, and fought to die hard.

Silvain put on his helmet and took his lance from Thibaut. "St. Denis to aid!" he cried and came down the hill at speed. But Thibaut looked and turned back.

Reason both had, for the knight was beaten to his knees and scrambling under the horses. Silvain's lance shot into the press, hurled man upon man and flung them down. He let it fall among them as his charge bore him by, then turned his horse and came at them with the sword. They were lightly armoured, no more than breastplate or coat of mail on any man, they could not hold him off but by weight of odds, and he had broken them so that they might not draw together against him.

Away up the hill, "Come again, brothers, come again," Thibaut was calling, "the meat is cooked now." And the fugitive men-at-arms slinking back to see, took heart of grace and charged with him, and charged men who broke away from them and fled.

Then Silvain sprang down and set that lonely knight on his feet. "Sir, I pray you forgive me that I came. But indeed you have honour enough."

"Honour the pig's tail," says that knight. "Where the devil are they gone?" He put up his vizor, showed a fat red face and, dashing sweat from his eyes, looked after the rout. One man was out ahead and drawing away from his fellows in defeat, but they made fast work too and the laggard men-at-arms were losing them. "Back into covert," the red face growled, and called off the pursuit with a huntsman's shout and swore.

"But I must not spoil your sport, sir," Silvain cried. "To horse again and we will beat their covert."

The square old knight looked him over. "Now who are you that are so ready?"

"I am Silvain de St. Lo."

"A good name to carry," the little eyes were cunning. "And what brought you in, Sir Silvain?"

"Sir, I struck in for a nameless knight who fought at odds."

"By the horns of the devil, I had need of you. You have a right to my name and all of mine. I am Clement de la Narvée. Old Red Clement," his eyes twinkled at Silvain. "But what is your work here?"

"I ride to honour and fortune."

The old man laughed. "Like a landless man. Well, I have been young in my life too. Come, ride to dinner."

"What, sir, break off your hunt? There is light enough for merry work yet."

"The rogue is off over the march. It is Brittany there beyond. We shall make no more of it now. But never fear, old Clement can find a venture for you if you have a mind to it." He swung himself heavily to the saddle and led off, and he talked much of nothing.

They came over the fields to a river winding in glittering pools among sand banks where the smell of the sea lingered. Before a cluster of low houses a few boats lay in the sand and farther out aground in the shallow water a ship of two masts. What had been a strong castle rose from a knoll above the bank, but its wall was breached and the keep lay in ruins.

"That is English work," said Sir Clement, "when they tried for St. Michel. They harried us, the devil afflict them, they shall pay me yet," and he laughed. "Come on, lad. I have meat on the spit and a bottle in the cellar, as poor as I look."

Only one tower of his castle was in living order, but there he made Silvain good cheer enough with mutton from the salt marsh and wild fowl and a heady white wine of Anjou. It was a little room and they ate alone, sending Messire Thibaut's melancholy dignity to the men-at-arms in the kitchen. "Who has no Hall must live proud," said the old knight and talked of food and

drink. But when they had only wine left, "I will die for it, you are a clever fellow, Silvain," he cried, and his little eyes twinkled. "What is behind your grave face that you ask me nothing?"

"Good faith, sir, I have thought of nothing to ask you but how much of this rare wine a man should drink who would say his prayers after."

Sir Clement pushed the wine jug over. "If I had broken a man safe out of a lost fight, I should be asking him how the devil he lost it." And he made haste to explain. It was his work and the work of his fathers to guard the border. The Bretons were ever hard rogues and of late had grown bold, for they had found a leader. It was an outlaw from England, a Sieur de Richemont, who had gathered a band of masterless men and made wicked work with his forays into France. "A lean little thing he is with a sour priest's face. Did you mark him?"

"It was such a man led their flight."

Sir Clement laughed. "You have him. He does not love the steel. But a restless rogue and full of cunning. No peace on the border while he is loose. I have hunted a cold scent often and never come up with him till this day. The fiend makes the luck for him! He had more men than I counted and stiff stuff they were, and mine—they are poor hounds that hunt with a poor knight. So the wolf is safe off again to harry us."

Then Silvain said, "Sir, a man might seek this wolf in his lair."

"And rouse all Brittany?" The old knight shook his head. "By my soul, I ask no better. But that is to make war. And we must keep the King's peace. It is an order from the constable of St. Michel. Catch the knave o' God's name, says he, but no fighting over the border. The devil burn their policies. Peace is a sheep's life, Silvain."

"Sir, a man might go alone," said Silvain.

The old knight struck his fist on the table. "Mock

me, you are wise. Time was, I would have gone and asked no better. But I grow old, Silvain. You have seen me beaten down."

"Oh, sir, I am shamed," Silvain cried out. "You have shown me how a knight should fight without hope and I am so dull and gross I seem to mock you. Pray you believe it is not in my heart, which thanks you for a merry venture."

"God's faith, you are young," the old man stared at him. "Will you go?"

In the dawn Silvain and Thibaut rode out from that castle by the river, but Silvain left his armour behind, for he said that he was a Norman horse dealer taking two chargers to sell in Brittany and Thibaut his groom. "But for the love of God, let me talk for both, as the wife said when her man would go to confession," Thibaut grumbled. "Did you ever sell anything in all your days, my lord?"

"I have had nothing to sell but my life," said Silvain mildly.

Thibaut blinked at him. "Yes, faith, that is for sale every day."

"What else is it for, brother?"

"Quoth Dan prodigal when he spent his portion. But there is no more where that came from."

Silvain laughed. "Courage, brother, I sell mine dear. I will buy honour and fortune with it before all is spent. I do not die a naked man."

They came over the border without adventure and rode on through a peaceful land. There was no sign of the band which had harried Sir Clement. It was hard to find a man to talk with and harder to make him talk. When they found at last a poor village and a poorer tavern the cunning of Thibaut was tried hard and much biting cider poured out before he could hear anything of the Sieur de Richemont. But the master of the house growing mellow was brought to confess that he had heard of a lord in the country, an English lord on

his travels, who might buy a horse. People said he was gone to the shrine of St. Yves.

"The devil was sick, the devil a saint would be," says Thibaut to his master. And through the hot afternoon sun they made for the hill of St. Yves, a long ride back towards the border. It took them into moorland of gorse and heather, but the sun was gone and the colour, before the great stones on the hill top, a shrine older than any Christian saint, loomed dark against the sky. Then Silvain dismounted. "Look to the horses," he said. "I will see what this lord is worth."

Under the hill was a little church and a village. Coming softly through the gloom, Silvain saw firelight and heard a murmur of voices. The Sieur de Richemont's men lay in bivouac about the church. There was no doubt of them, for they talked both English and French, and talked of their failure to break into France and cursed their luck.

"Here is no happy company. But where is their captain?" Silvain smiled and lay close.

A small man came out of the priest's house and talked with them. Silvain did not like his voice, which was thin and careful. It had words of condescension for one and another, and as the little man moved among them he came into the firelight and Silvain saw the thin sour face which had been first when they fled. It praised their loyalty, it promised them that they should try for France again in the morning and departed. They did not murmur till he was gone, and then though they grumbled they said no word against the little man. This meekness bewildered Silvain: men who would harry a countryside, men who would fight as they fought, were not apt in his world to choose such a leader.

"Where is he gone then, this pale clerk?" Silvain stole aside to see. He was gone into the church.

And it was a long while before he came out again.

Then slowly he climbed the hill. Silvain made off and stole up on the other side. When he could see the shrine of St. Yves on the top, one flat stone on the ground with a hollow where the saint laid his head, guarded by three great stones erect, there the Sieur de Richemont knelt. But what he was praying Silvain could not tell, for he prayed in English. "Here is piety," Silvain said. "Well, brother, I also can pray. Let us see who will be heard. A challenge!" So he knelt too.

When the Sieur de Richemont rose from his knees and came out of the shrine there rose before him a taller man whose sword sang over his head and came down. The Sieur de Richemont was struck only with the flat of it, but he fell like a dead man. Then Silvain knotted his arms in his own girdle and bound his cloak over his head and carried him away.

When dawn was breaking two weary horses came again past Sir Clement's watchman on the border and bore three men to his castle.

The old knight ran down to the courtyard unkempt before the first of them was out of the saddle. "By my body, you are swift and sure, Silvain," he cried, and his eyes goggled at the little man who lay across Thibaut's horse like a sack.

"That I do not know," Silvain said. "God forgive me if I have taken a saint. He has been at prayers all the way."

"When he was not swearing. And he swears like a cat," said Thibaut. "Hark!" for the man had slipped to the ground and the noise which came out of the cloak was shrill.

"Look if he be your man, sir," Silvain turned away. "I am weary of him and very empty."

But Sir Clement called to his men-at-arms and carried the prisoner off still muffled and bound.

Then Thibaut, while wearily and groaning he laboured for the horses in the ramshackle stable, said:

"It is done and it was well done and it was a bold deed to do. But who gains by it, my lord?"

"We gain honour, brother."

"I think it is the honour of the cat, my lord. When she pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for the monkey to eat. Meow, quoth puss, here is nor meat nor milk."

"We have done work for France."

"By my faith, you have deserved well of monkey land, quoth jackanapes."

Silvain laughed and left him grimacing.

But in the kitchen there was mutton, ham, and cider made hot with honey and, bidding them serve his master, Messire Thibaut licked his black chops and was comforted. On this fare Silvain fed in the little room in the tower till the old knight found him and denounced it and called boisterously for wine and better meat, swearing that they must feast. So fast he talked of larder and cellar, so he plied Silvain who was a hungry man, that much time was spent before Silvain's gentle voice stole into his jovial noise with: "I see that the man was your man, sir?"

"Devil doubt him, the very rascal." The old knight filled Silvain's cup again. "Ha, you do not miss your man, Silvain. You take your lance and down goes he. I pledge you, lad. Here is a life of merry ventures."

Silvain drank temperately. "Sir, you are generous. Pray will you find me another?"

"Oh, lad, I wish my old bones could ride with you. We would make blithe work in the world. But that is for you. I belong to the past. You have all before you, you rogue. And I must stay here and keep the peace of the march till I grow into the ground. Old man's work, lad, there is nothing else here." He poured the wine again. "Ah, never talk of it. To the devil with cares. Good fortune to good swords!"

Silvain drank it discreetly. "All is well with you now this man is taken?"

"By my body it is," the old knight laughed, "and

very well. There is no other knave will trouble me now."

"Sir, I am glad that I have done thus much service," said Silvain gently.

The old man's eyes twinkled. "Good service it was, I will not deny you." He fumbled in his gown and pulled out a purse. "The fellow is worth a price, lad," and he began to tell out gold pieces.

"I pray you, sir, do not think so meanly of me," Silvain cried.

"Fie, lad, I know young knights go poor. And as poor as I am I can pay the man who guards my land."

Silvain looked at the little pile of gold on the table. "I did not bring in this man for a price. I do not traffic in men's flesh."

"Call it his ransom then and take it up," the old man thrust at the money and laughed. "Never fear, lad, he is worth that to me behind an iron door."

"You shall forgive me, sir," said Silvain gently. "I went out for honour. Let me have what there is."

"You are young, God save you," the old man laughed again and picked up the money. "Pride is dear, lad."

"By my faith, it costs all I have and more. But I pay as I go and live lightly," Silvain smiled. "Pray you, sir, what is this man's fortune now? Do you hold him to ransom?"

"Ransom my foot! He is an exile, a broken man. Hang him up, he is empty."

"But I would not desire that," said Silvain gently. "And by my faith, Sir Clement, it would not be courtesy to me."

The old man laughed. "You are a quaint, solemn fellow. Why, man, it was only a curse at him. I am no hangman. I shall take him to St. Michel and let the governor take order with him. He has broken the peace of the march. He is for Estoteville's hand. The iron cage of St. Michel will keep him safe enough."

"I have heard that the Sieur d'Estoteville is a wise and gallant captain," said Silvain.

"Why, man, none nobler in France," Sir Clement stared.

"I pray you, sir, bring me to him if you can in justice commend me. For it is in my mind that he could send me upon ventures whereof I might win honour and fortune."

The old knight looked cunning. "The devil doubt you," he muttered and then he laughed again. "I will take you, lad, with all my heart. By my body, you have earned it." He started up. "Give me leave now. We must sail when the tide turns," and he bustled out and Silvain went to bed.

CHAPTER V

THE VOYAGE OF THE SIEUR DE RICHEMONT

IT was still before noon when they roused him and rowed him out to that two-masted ship of Sir Clement's. The old knight was on board already and gone down to his cabin, so his men said, offering Silvain another to have his sleep out. But he joined with them to haul on the cable and stayed on deck. The tide was running out fast, and soon they came to the mouth of the river and met broken water. Then Messire Thibaut, sliding across the deck, brought up on Silvain, where he stood watching men aloft.

"Hold by me and I will hold by thee, as the hen said to the duck when the flood washed her away," quoth Thibaut.

"I would like well to be there," Silvain said, pointing to a man on the swaying mainyard.

"So would not I," Thibaut grimaced. "I am not greedy. We have our own pleasures, as the vixen said to her cub when he wanted to run with the hunted stag. Pray you, my lord, why did they laugh when they said Sir Clement was gone to his cabin?"

"Why, brother, every man laughs when another is seasick."

"So it is. When Father Noah ran to the side, merry they were in the ark. But is it the sea he hides from, this old knight? I do not like his pig's eyes. And they are very merry men on this ship, my lord. When I asked how long we should be making St. Michel, again they laughed. I pray you, where is the jest in that?"

"They saw Messire Thibaut seasick too. Look, man, there is St. Michel already." Across the bay the

pinnacle of the church took the sun, and below it the walls and towers of the castle which grew from the mass of the mount shimmered through a silver haze. Silvain crossed himself and said a prayer to the saint of high places.

"There is the mount and the Marvel," said Thibaut, twisting his eyebrows. "But I have no comfort of it, as the pig said when the butcher drove him past his wallow. For this ship points another way."

Silvain laughed. "Why, brother, that is the seaman's craft. The sea is a hill to climb zigzag."

But when he found that these seamen did not put their ship about, when they held on northward so long that Mont St. Michel was far away on the port quarter and still ran on by the sandy shore that stretched away beyond Avranches, he sought the captain, a big bearded Norman.

"When do you think to come to St. Michel, friend?" says he gently.

"I sail by my orders." The man hunched his shoulder and turned away.

Silvain disturbed Sir Clement in his privacy. That old knight was not sick. A salt herring and white wine were going into him. "In good time, lad," he called out. "I have just sent to seek you."

"Sir, we are then of the same mind. For I also desire your company."

"As long as you will," says the old knight heartily.

"Why, there it is. Sir, I fear you are too kind to me. They say that you are taking me not to St. Michel, but on a longer voyage."

"And, by my body, that is the very thing I had to tell you. When I had this rogue safe aboard, I called him up and told him that I was carrying him to the Governor of St. Michel. Then the knave mocked me, saying he was no Frenchman to be under French justice and lie in a French prison, and his English king would not suffer it. The devil be his steward! True it is

D'Estoteville is a wary man, and he will not thank me if I bring down English pirates on the mount. His father had enough of that. So I thought of it again, lad, and it came to my mind this Sieur de Richemont is an outlaw and all his house, and the King of England would be blithe to lay hands on him."

"That is the hunchback," Silvain murmured.

"Ay, Richard Crookback. Then said I, 'English are you and England shall have you.' "

"Surely it is in the Scripture," said Silvain gently. " 'Thou hast appealed unto Caesar. To Caesar shalt thou go.' "

"Right Scripture, lad." The old knight rubbed his hands and his little eyes twinkled. "You have said. So to England go we and the devil give him joy of it."

"But what joy for us, sir? Richard the Hunchback has no gentle fame."

"Fear not you. King Richard likes well to lay his hands on his enemies. He will pay the price. By my body, Silvain, this falls well for you. I will speak for you, I will tell your tale and the Crookback loves a bold blade. His own sword won his crown and must keep it. There is a King to serve! Merry ventures, lad."

Silvain looked at the old man gravely. "By Our Lady, I see a great venture," he said in a low voice. "Sir, my fear is that I am not worthy of it."

"Fear the pig's tail," the old knight chuckled. "I have had a life of fighting, lad, and I never knew a better man to have at my back." Silvain had to help him empty his bottle.

In the hold upon the stone ballast the Sieur de Richemont sat bound hand and foot to a ringbolt. Having sought him all over the ship, Silvain came down into the dim light and found him by the murmur of his voice. He was praying, and Silvain joined in the prayer.

The man broke off and opened his eyes and stared at him. "What would you do more?" he said, quavering.

Silvain finished the prayer and crossed himself. "That I cannot tell," he said. "Sir, it is in my mind that I do not know you."

"It is you—it is you who took me at the shrine of St. Yves," the thin voice rose.

"That man am I. What man are you?"

The little man licked his lips. "I am the King of England."

"Then are you much belied. For men say that one Richard the Hunchback is King in England and you are the Sieur de Richemont, a landless man and a robber."

"Henry of Richmond I am, Henry Tudor, and landless this day, but King of England in the eyes of God. Oh man, take heed what you do who lay hands upon God's chosen."

"Sir, it is most true that God is my seigneur: but just is He. And the man I took was no king, but a knight that harried the march of France and set his hand upon Sir Clement to beat an old man down by numbers."

"Good fellow, you serve an ill master. He has cheated you, to your shame. I have harried no man's land. I was coming into France to take refuge with your King, who is my good friend, when this old knight broke out on me and sought to take me. Oh friend, when you struck me down in the shrine of St. Ives, you did foul wrong. A blow on holy ground, a blow at your own King's cousin! How shall you clean your soul of sin?"

"Sir, you are too gracious. I pray you think not of my soul but of your poor body, for that has shorter life."

"I lie here your prisoner."

"Good faith, sir, not mine, but Sir Clement's. The ship is his and the men are his and he carries you to England to sell you to Richard the Hunchback. What lies before you? That lord has murdered his brother and the children of his brother."

"You say well, good fellow," the thin voice answered steadily. "You have sold me to a butcher. Think how you shall deliver your soul from hell."

"I think for you, my lord. Come, I can bring you arms and we two can break upon Sir Clement's men and fight our lives out. There is honour and a knightly end."

"I have a King's life in my hand. I may not cast it away. Look what you may do. There is no honour for you in my death."

"I pray you, my lord—I offer you a knight's death. Will you go on to the death of a sheep at the slaughter?"

"You speak to a King, fellow."

Silvain looked at him long. "You have chosen," he said. "Alas, my lord, it is the better venture for me, but I am sorry for you in this hour," and he drew his dagger.

The little man closed his eyes and bowed his head and began to pray. But it was not at him that Silvain struck. His dagger went down between the planks and he turned it and drew it out and struck again till he had made a hole and the sea was coming in.

Then the little man cried out and writhed against the rope and called him mad. "Peace, peace," said Silvain. "You have no part in this," and he made his way into the after hold and there dealt with the timbers at his leisure.

Some while after he came on deck and found Thibaut, who ran at him, tongue out for news: "What is the true truth now, my lord?"

Silvain laughed. "Thus it lies. We are bound for England to sell our souls there. Yet I know not, brother. This ship goes not where men think. For this morning she was going to St. Michel." He took Thibaut's arm and paced the deck and stopped by the fore hatch. "Hark you, friend. It is as if a poor soul cried below." And Thibaut listened and his dark face

twisted, for what he heard was not a man's voice, and he looked at the smile of Silvain and he ran to the captain.

That silent man thrust him aside, still chattering, and rolled to the hatch and listened and called his boatswain. The hatch was opened and there came up the noise of water and a thin cry. The captain peered down and swore: "Go rouse Sir Clement out," he said and lowered a man down in a line and so brought up Richmond, wet and shivering. And while he made soundings there a man ran to tell him that the after hold was full of water.

Then Silvain said "Come, brother, arm me."

"Now, God give you grace!" Thibaut wriggled his brows. "You will drown quick enough without clothes of iron."

"I would die with my armour on," Silvain smiled and looked at the land. "Help me, brother."

"I never loved water in all my days. As the hen said when they boiled her." Thibaut groaned. And standing aside to let Sir Clement come up they went down to their arms.

The old knight was hardly roused from his vinous sleep, and when he came blinking and grumbling that they troubled him and saw Richmond, he thrust at the captain and cried out, "The devil flay you, why have you brought that knave on deck?"

"The wretch was drowning below. Look down, all the ship is awash."

Sir Clement looked and drew back. "By my body, she is full of water. Oh villain, what have you done? A good ship master, you. I give you a ship sound and stanch and you break her on the rocks in broad day."

"Here be no rocks," the Norman frowned. "She has had no hurt of me. She is old timber. She has started her seams as she met the sea."

So they quarrelled about it, and Henry of Richmond

huddled himself together in the sun and licked his thin lips and said no word.

"While you talk, you sink," the Norman cried at last. And indeed the ship laboured heavily. "Enough of this. I must run for the land and beach her. Thank God for a sandy shore."

"There? That is under Avranches."

"What then? Better under Avranches than under water."

"Put back, man, put back."

"Then we swim for it. Let me be, in God's name. I sail this ship."

"The devil's own sailor!" Sir Clement growled, and called men and bade them stand by Richmond and never leave him, sink or swim.

When Silvain came on deck in his armour the helm had gone over and the ship was labouring towards the land, and the captain telling Sir Clement that he would find the leaks while the tide was out, but would not promise to caulk them before it was high again, and Sir Clement swore that it would be damnation to linger there and could not be still, so he fretted.

"Good faith, sir, your prisoner brings his own luck with him," Silvain smiled.

"Right, by St. Jacques," the captain cried, "we carry Jonah."

"Jonah my foot! I hold him, sink or swim," the old knight said.

"He is sodden already," Silvain said compassionately. "But I pray you, sir, what broke your ship?"

"Do I know?" the old knight stamped his foot. "Go to the devil and ask him."

"Alas, sir, I trouble you," Silvain smiled.

The ship was nearing land, but with a strong ebb to fight the captain still kept all her canvas spread and even so she came in slowly. There was sandy beach before her, glistening far on either side beyond the line of foam, and the sea was calm enough and the

shore sank steeply. To beach her was easy. The bow struck and as the captain shouted an order to down the great sails, she checked and glided on again and grounded heavily. He flung an anchor out in the bows and men sprang overside waist deep in water to carry it up the beach.

The tide falls far on that coast, but the ebb was nearly spent when she grounded and even at low water she would not be dry. The captain set himself to drag her up the beach, put spars under her stem and had every man hauling on the cable, save the sorry prisoner and his guards. It was heavy work and slow, and while they were about it horsemen rode down to the beach and watched them and rode off.

Then Sir Clement gave tongue. No more pulling and hauling. The seamen must work on her where she lay and work fast. His fellows must stand to arms. They would have all the countryside on them in an hour.

"Why, sir, what should we fear?" Silvain said. "We are Frenchmen in France. We have done no man wrong."

"Oh fool, we are wrecked and this is the land of wreckers. You will see them come down on us like crows on a dying sheep."

"But this is not Christian," said Silvain mildly. "This is not kind nor courteous."

"Did ever you find a Christian when you had need of one?" Sir Clement laughed. "By my body, to the weak all men are wolves."

"Alas, my lord, you have had ill fortune in your life," Silvain said gently. "But it is in my mind that I have not lived like a sheep nor like a sheep shall I die."

Then they built a breastwork of sand before the ship and lay and watched while the seamen laboured to get under her, bailing and thrusting her over. But soon a throng was seen marching across the meadows, and scouts came on before and hovered and made off and a flight of arrows was shot. The seamen ran to shelter

behind the ship, the men-at-arms lay close in their holes in the sand. Seeing no movement, the band of wreckers came on boldly and as they drew near broke into a run. When they were close on the breastwork Silvain sprang out upon them and struck down who stood in his way.

"Name of St. Denis! What would you have of us? We be Frenchmen in our own land," he cried. "You break the King's peace."

He won a hearing, for none of them had a mind to venture against his armour of proof and his heavy hand. They were a rabble of archers and country folk fighting with short spears and axes and cudgels and with no mail to guard them. They checked and drew off and stared at him.

"What would you have, my brothers?" he cried again. "We bring you no ill. We are Frenchmen and your friends. We would do you no hurt. But if you strike at us, it is blow for blow and no mercy to any man of you all."

Then some one shouted them on with a huntsman's call. "Loo, loo! In upon him and pull him down!"

They came on again, they were many, they could move lightly in the sand and Silvain sank where he stood. They surged past him like the tide round a rock and charged the breastwork. The old knight and his men met them sturdily, the seamen came into the fight with spars and hammer and knife, and Silvain, labouring through the sand, clove his way into the midst. Their numbers were not enough to make good their weakness man for man, many were beaten down, the others held off and broke and ran.

Silvain put up his vizor and wiped the sweat from his eyes. "God's grace! That is over," he said. "I take no pleasure in it. Alas, poor rogues, you were worth a better venture." And he said a prayer for the souls of the dead.

But the old knight broke in upon him. "Let be, man.

Beasts they are and like beasts they die. This thing is not over yet. You do not know our Normans. See, the pack gathers again."

"And with a leader. There is one who bears a knight's arms, to his shame. Do you know that blazon, my lord? Martlets red upon gold."

"The devil burn him, I know him not. What does it matter who he is? Every seigneur on the coast makes prey of wrecks. Look, he marshals his archers. Down, men, down." He turned and made his way to Richmond where he sat bound and guarded still. "Content your heart," he grinned. "Here is no rescue for you. I hold you fast."

Now the arrows were shot into the air so that they fell straight and behind the breastwork, and though the archers were not many nor their skill sure, men were struck and slain where they lay. The knight of the martlets rode out to see their fortune and called his men to the charge again. They came down the beach again shouting while still the archers shot over their heads.

"Lie close yet," the old knight said. "Stand fast, Silvain. Rally on him, lads."

A trumpet sounded and Silvain started up. Horsemen were coming over the sand dunes. He saw a banner, azure, and or. The knight of the martlets saw it too and turned and put spurs to his horse and after him ran his men.

Then Silvain shouted: "You of the red martlets! No knight are you. I cry you coward, I, Silvain de St. Lo."

"Peace, lad, peace," said Sir Clement. "What damned thing is this?"

"He flees from a trumpet and a banner," Silvain said. "This is an evil day."

The old knight looked at that banner which bore a golden mitre. "The devil's own day," he muttered and turned upon Richmond and raised his sword.

Silvain gripped his arm. "God pardon you, sir," he said gently.

"Let be. I know what I do." He freed himself and struck, but Silvain's sword took the blow. Silvain sprang in front of him and laid hold of Richmond, hand upon throat, and swung the little man away from his guards and stood across his body.

"Oh, sir, this is not friendly," Silvain said. "The man is mine."

"Yours or mine he will hang us all if he lives," but Silvain stood on guard. "The devil burn you, you are mad," he rushed in striking fiercely, and as he struck he yelled to his men. "In on the rogue and stab him." Silvain had work enough to hold him off, having no mind to make an end of him, for the old knight knew his trade and he fought to kill though he died. "Daggers, lads, daggers," he yelled. "Go in." Silvain won a moment to beat down two as they came upon him from behind and Thibaut crept up and crouched at his back with dagger and sword. The others who were left alive stood off and the captain beckoned the seamen about him. "Let wolf fight wolf," he said. "Stand by the ship," and he watched the horsemen coming over the sands.

But Sir Clement fought the harder, cursing them all till a desperate stroke of his at Silvain's throat was beaten down by a blow that struck the sword from his hand and crashed upon his side and bore him to the ground and he lay faint and bleeding.

Again the trumpet sounded. The banner of the golden mitre was near. The horsemen halted in array and a knight rode out from among them to the trampled breastwork and the dead. "What men are you that make war in France?" he said.

Then the captain answered him: "We are Frenchmen and honest mariners that beach our leaking ship. And here come wreckers fighting us for our ship and our lives."

"If you speak true, you shall have amends."

But Richmond was on his feet. "Sir, whose knight are you?" he said.

The knight looked at his mean little shape and the dirt upon him and his bound arms and laughed. "Why, what great lord is here?"

"Sir, I was courteous," the thin voice answered. "Be it as you will. I am the guest on your shore. You bear the banner of Holy Church. I am the King of England."

"God give us counsel!" the knight stared at him. "How are you here then, my lord? And who are these?"

"I came a prisoner, their prisoner, for they are rogues and masterless men." He made in some hurry to the knight. "I claim sanctuary under the banner of the Church."

"Why, my lord, you are safe enough. But how do you say? You are King Richard?"

"Richard Crookback is no king, sir. I am Henry of Richmond, King of England by her law and the will of God."

The knight considered him with wondering eyes. "My lord, we serve the Lord Bishop of Avranches. He must hear of this. I pray you ride with me. Gather up these fellows, Robert, and bring them on and set a guard on the ship."

A dismal company made that march. When the sedate discipline of the Bishop's men-at-arms riding before and behind and on the flanks quelled the curses on Silvain and the outcry against Sir Clement, their company went sullenly as men without hope who would not show fear. The old knight, hardly held in the saddle on a led horse, had no strength nor spirit left. But Silvain, who refused the horse that was offered to his knight's armour, gave his helmet to Thibaut to carry and strode on over the meadows with his fair head flung back singing softly a Latin hymn.

They climbed the hill of Avranches with its fair prospect of winding river and rich woodland and golden bay, and saw afar the tower of St. Michel against the sky of sunset, and Thibaut groaned.

"God help you, my lord, what do you sing?"

"I sing evensong," Silvain smiled. "I give thanks."

"So did the lark before he was put in the pudding."

"Be happy, brother. We have won honour this day."

But Thibaut wriggled his long neck and felt at it. "The honour of the rope," said he.

The gate of the Bishop's castle closed behind them and they were marched down into the crypt beneath the hall, but to Sir Clement and Silvain was given the honour of a dungeon each.

CHAPTER VI

GRATITUDE OF THE SIEUR DE RICHEMONT

THE Bishop of Avranches was a large, sleek man. He sat in his hall with a priest on either side of him, and when Richmond was brought in by a bowing chamberlain the young knight of the shore came out of the shadow and said, "My lord, this is he. He declares himself Sir Henry of Richmond, who would be King of England."

The Bishop gathered his gown about him and stood up, making thereby Richmond very small and mean: "Sir, in my humble wise I welcome you to the realm of France."

"Do I speak to the Bishop of Avranches?"

"Unworthily I serve that office."

Richmond knelt and asked his blessing.

The Bishop raised his hand and gave it in full form and Richmond crossed himself. The Bishop sat down and smoothed his gown over his knees and made little noises to himself like a cat purring.

It was necessary for Richmond to explain himself. He licked his thin lips and began, "My lord, the arm of God has guarded me this day. Your men were sent to deliver me from outrage and death."

"Alas, my lord, into what perils has the hand of God led you?" The Bishop's voice was low and hoarse.

"It is to make trial of me and to raise up friends for me."

"A pious thought, my son. Surely it shall bring you peace."

"I am as he who fell among thieves and was saved by the good Samaritan," Richmond bowed. The Bishop nodded and smiled and made his little noises. "But I have had foul wrong and at the hands of Frenchmen. This I must tell you, my lord, for the honour of your King. I was coming into France where I was promised brotherly welcome when I was assailed by an old knight, one Clement de la Narvée, and hardly escaped back into Brittany. Then he sent after me a young man who spied upon me and took me by stealth while I was at prayers in the shrine of St. Yves and carried me off to Sir Clement's castle. And these two put me on shipboard to take me to England and sell me to the butcher Richard of Gloucester. This was my welcome to France, my lord."

"God forbid that you should say so! Here is sacrilege and treason and the selling of man's blood. What knaves are men!"

"My lord, I desire no vengeance upon them. Let justice be done. Have them before you and hear them. I cannot tell. There may be something more to know."

"Their blood be on their own heads," the Bishop rumbled. "Surely, they shall not go down to the grave in peace. Hugo!" he beckoned to the young knight. "This Clement—bring him up before us and the youth that took my lord and the captain of the ship." He bent his big frame in deference. "Please you, my lord, these shall suffice?"

"You speak my own mind. The master must pay for the man, that is justice. I am not greedy for blood."

Silvain came in unarmed, lithe and tall, and he smiled as he came, and after him the old knight shuffled on a servant's arm, and behind him the captain scowled.

Silvain bowed low to the Bishop. "I pray you, my lord, of your grace let this knight sit, for he is a weary man and wounded."

"And by your hand," Richmond said.

"Good faith, my lord, all is by my hand," Silvain smiled. "And here am I to answer it."

"Who are you that speaks so bold?" the Bishop rumbled.

"My lord, I am Silvain de St. Lo and I ride to win honour and fortune."

"You bear a good rebel's name."

"My father and King Louis stand at the judgment seat of God. It is not for my father you need fear, my lord."

"Why, here is one who will teach me all that I must do. I pray you, say on, say on."

"My lord, you spoke against a dead man who was my father," Silvain said gently. "Nor he nor any other has blame of this matter, but me only. This venture is mine. As I came into the marches of Brittany I heard of one who was King of England and a wanderer. And it seemed to me a venture of renown to capture this lord and carry him off. Therefore I rode into Brittany and took him and was carrying him even into his own England, and these others have no part in it."

"By St. Jacques, I know nothing of him who he is till this hour," the captain said. "I am a seaman."

Sir Clement blinked his little eyes at Silvain and groaned and hung his head.

The Bishop turned heavily to Richmond. "Here is our knave, and shameless he is."

"There is more in it than this, my lord," Richmond said. "Let us put the others to the question."

"What more? Guilty is his plea. Habemus confitentem reum. We have the rogue confessed." The Bishop smiled and made his little grunting purring noises. "Away with them, Hugo, away."

And Hugo, who had not learnt to love his Englishman, marched them off while Richmond was protesting. "This is no way to learn the truth of it, my lord."

"Alas, that you should say so," the Bishop rumbled. "For I have done the King's justice on Frenchmen

many a year in this poor way of mine. Nay, my lord, you shall have all justice. What punishment do you ask for this man who delivers himself into my hand?"

"Nay, I ask none," Richmond bit his lip.

"Now you speak like a king, my lord," the Bishop murmured.

"But this case is not tried. It is that old rogue Clement who stands behind; he is guilty, he and his. He is hired by Richard of Gloucester. There is a damnable plot in France against me and he is the master of it. Search it out, my lord, if you would serve me."

The Bishop opened his eyes wide. "Alas, my lord, I am an old, simple man. I pray you help me. How shall it serve you to make a great noise in the world that Richard of England can raise up enemies against you where he will? For I cannot tell. Or how shall it win you friends in France if we hang Frenchmen for your sake? Or how shall it make you strong in England to show the King of France fierce in your cause? I do not understand these things."

"God forbid that I should be a man of blood," said Richmond. "Blessed are the merciful," and he crossed himself. The Bishop made his little purring noises. "I am in your hands, my lord."

"This young one who carries his head so high," the Bishop rumbled. "I wonder what is the truth of him."

"He is a wild wayward fellow," Richmond said quickly. "He goes to my heart," the thin lips smiled. "I own I forgive him most easily. My lord, let me carry him your forgiveness too."

"It is your pleasure," the Bishop said, and when he was gone turned to the priest on his right hand. "Now which is the deepest liar of all these?" he rumbled.

Where he lay in the gloom of a cell underground Silvain saw torchlight. The torches were thrust into iron rings upon the wall, the warders made way for Richmond to come in and closed the door upon them.

"We are met again, friend," the thin lips smiled, "and you lie prisoner now."

"Indeed, it was I who changed our places," Silvain said gently. "I am content this night."

"But your life is mine."

"I pray you, my lord, is there anything I have done which makes you think I fear death?"

"Oh, you are a bold fellow. You care nothing for men's lives. But why did you save mine?"

Silvain stood up and made him a bow. "My lord, I did not know that you knew it."

"Why did you save me?" Richmond said again.

"I had done you a wrong. Speak true, my lord, is that wrong made right?"

"I have no malice against you. You were beguiled. But why do you take the blame now? Let him suffer who cheated you and you may go free."

"My lord, I do not like your counsel."

"You are a wild heart, Silvain, and bold. I have honour for you."

"By my faith this is new," said Silvain gently.

"You need but a good cause and you shall do nobly. Here is a King's service. Come, ride with me. I have work for a loyal sword to guard me. God has chosen me for a noble task and who serves me well shall rise high."

Silvain looked at him long. "I do not doubt of it, my lord," he said. "I thank you. I must go my own way."

"Here is pride!" Richmond laughed. "I pray you, most noble, what irks you in me?"

"Can you not guess, my lord?" Silvain said gently. "We have proved each other, you and I."

"And you fear that I shall fail?"

"No, my lord. I fear that you will conquer."

They stood a moment eye to eye. Then Richmond called to the warders. "Take the torches and light me, good fellows. Here is one who loves the dark."

Afterwards there came to Silvain men who took him away into the hall and brought him food and wine. And when he had made his supper, a priest drew aside the curtain and beckoned him and led him to the room where the Bishop paced reading a book bound in silver. Silvain heard a murmur of Latin which was not a prayer: something about a child plucking apples in an orchard. The Bishop stopped and looked over his book and sat down. "You make me much trouble, my son," he rumbled. "What is the truth of you?"

"My lord, this King knows all."

The Bishop made his little noises. "You are not courteous to an old man. Even I know something, Silvain. But it is not all that I am told, nor only what I am told. You took him for that old rogue, you delivered him from that old rogue and you say that the plot to sell him to his death was yours. What man are you?"

"Good faith, my lord. I have done as I could and I have no shame in it all."

"I cannot tell what you have or what you seek. You saved him, you win upon him, here is a King to your friend and he bids you follow him to fortune, and you send him angry away. What would you have in this world?"

"So am I made, I must choose my own life. And I see no honour with him."

"That is lightly judged, Silvain. He is subtle and strong. When his hour comes I think he will not fail."

"And so I think, my lord. It is why I cannot follow him."

The Bishop smoothed his gown. "You who offered yourself to death if he might live."

"God forgive me, if his life shall hurt poor men. But if I let him die, I was shamed. I pray you, my lord, do you condemn me?"

"Who, I?" The Bishop held up his hands. "I am of this world," and he let his hands fall and bowed his

head and spoke low. " 'He saved others, himself He cannot save.' God help you, Silvain, you will live a poor man all your days."

Silvain flung back his head. "That I do not fear, my lord," he said. "I shall win fortune with my life."

The Bishop made his little purring noises. "Remember me when you are come into your kingdom," he said.

CHAPTER VII

THE KING'S LEOPARD

THIBAUT was eating the last of a goose pie. He licked his fingers and groaned. For his master was singing a ballad with a burden of "Your life is to-day, but mine is to-morrow."

They were riding the road on the bank above the Loire. The wide winding river flowed full and gave back mellow autumn light to the silver of murmuring willows and Silvain's bright armour and the shield with the golden star on Thibaut's back.

Thibaut looked at his fingers where no scrap of pastry or gravy was left. "What was is better than what is," he sighed, "but a poor soul must try everything, as the widow said when she went to church again."

Silvain tossed back his fair hair and looked far. "By my faith, I see the towers of St. Martin!" he cried.

"No saint for you, my lord. For he gave only half his cloak to the beggar. But you would give all and go bare, breast and back."

"Body of me, you are a hasty man, brother," Silvain smiled. "What would you have? I came out of Flanders yesterday with nothing but myself and my name and here I ride armed with golden crowns in my scrip. I gain upon the world as fast as I live. Be at peace, I shall never let fortune go. I am no saint to die poor."

An old woman driving a donkey came towards them where the road narrowed by a fall in the bank, and the donkey laden with a pannier of walnuts on either side needed much room. Silvain drew aside and stopped

and beckoned her on, calling "God bless you, mother, the road is yours," for she was flustered at hindering a knight and hauled on her donkey's head and could not stop the beast and so was borne on in shrill distress.

While he waited another horseman clattered past him and jostled the donkey on the woman, and upset her in a shower of walnuts and, cursing her, rode on, but not far. For Silvain came at speed and crashed into him from behind, shoulder to quarter, and the horse went into the willows and the rider to the ground.

Silvain was standing over him before he had stopped rolling. "Sir, you lack courtesy," he said sadly. "That has brought you down."

The man raised himself on one hand breathing heavily and brushed the dust from a hard eager face and looked about him and tried to rise.

"No," said Silvain. "You are in your right place there. You have hurt a woman." And he put his hand to his sword.

"What foul trick is this?" the man cried. "Who is your master?"

"Sir, I serve God in my humble wise. And would have you do so. I pray you ask pardon of her for the ill you have done her"—he pointed to the old woman grovelling after her walnuts—"good faith, she might be the mother of us both."

"The grandam with the ass?" the man laughed. "Your mother, friend, not mine," and again he tried to rise.

"Lie there yet," Silvain said, showing his sword.

Up the bank from the river came a naked boy. His white body glistened wet and was quivering with haste. He stood a moment watching them, the rippling muscles sank to rest and rose again. "Sir, sir, stand off from him or you shall rue it," he cried and marched on Silvain.

"Why, who are you that come so gallant and gay?" Silvain laughed.

"No matter for that. I stand for this lord." The boy came face to face with him. "Hold off, I say."

"God's faith, he must be better than he seems who has such a champion," Silvain said gravely and he drew back. "Up, sir, and do the woman right."

The man sprang up and stared at them both and gave an angry puzzled laugh. Then he caught his horse and flung the old woman some silver and sprang to the saddle and galloped away.

"Such is he," said Silvain. "But what are you, my lord?" He smiled at the boy, who indeed was good to see and bore himself nobly. "I think I have seen you in a sculpture of the blessed dead going up into heaven."

"I thank you, I am neither dead nor a lord," the boy laughed, "but the Sieur de Ligny's page."

"And that is the Sieur de Ligny?"

"God forbid," the boy said.

"Amen. For I would have no friend of mine serve him."

"Sir, I thank you that you call me friend. You are a gentle knight." The boy turned and ran back to the river and dived and swam away to the farther shore.

The old woman had gathered her walnuts and her silver and was hurrying away from the place where such wild adventures came. Thibaut brought up the horses. "God save you, how you make friends!" says he. "Here is an old wife gone grumbling that ever she saw your face, and a rich lord cursing you that you were born." He worked his eyebrows. "You take too much trouble, as the cock said when the hen ate her egg."

Silvain laughed. "But the boy was pleased with me, brother," he said.

That night they came over the long bridge into Tours and before he ate Silvain made haste to the abbey of St. Martin. In the tomb hewn out of the rock beneath the high altar where the body of the saint lay within the

silver bars he prayed for noble ventures and happy fortune.

So with good heart he went in the morning to seek King Charles. The sister who was his guardian, Dame Anne de Beaujeu, had brought the boy to hold his court in the Archbishop's palace. Silvain's high bearing or Silvain's doublet of blue silk embroidered with much gold, won him the entry, unknown as he was. What surprised him was that he found few others waiting audience. He turned back from the hall, where among the lounging ushers half a dozen sombre men like lawyers or merchants were close in talk, and found in the courtyard a dozen more of the same meek solemnity. He joined them where they walked to and fro. Silvain always sought friends. While he greeted them they looked queerly at his blue and gold. They waited for him to make talk. "Good faith, we be the smallest court that ever I saw," he smiled. "I thought to find all the lords of France here."

"Then you come late."

"Why, sir, is the King gone?"

"No. The lords," says one grimly but another laughed. "Have patience. The lords go and the King remains."

"Sir, you talk darkly."

"If it is the lords you seek, seek the Duke of Orleans."

"I thank you. I would have the King for my lord," Silvain said quickly, and thought quickly too. For Louis of Orleans was the boy King's cousin and should stand at his right hand. If he had broken with King Charles and Madame Anne and the great lords chose to follow him, there would be trouble in France. "I pray you give me counsel," Silvain said. "Is my Lord of Orleans not by the King's side?"

They looked at him curiously, they could be seen wondering whether he was as candid as his blue eyes, but they had not to answer.

Oxen dragged a groaning wagon into the courtyard and they must watch, for it bore a great cage in which lay a leopard. The wagoners slid the cage to the ground and turned their oxen and made off. The leopard whined and arched his back and thrust out his paws and scratched at the stones.

"God's faith, he is comely," Silvain said. "I would like well to set him free."

"So would not I," said one. "Comely? Why, the devil made his beauty." And another. "This is for the King to bait. He loves all fierce things."

Out from the palace a boy came running. He was small enough to be not yet in his teens but his face was pale and old. Some vigour he had, for he ran furiously, but he was so ill made, breast and back jutting out over puny legs, his head by far too big for him, that he seemed even smaller than he was, feeble and sickly.

The grave men about Silvain bared their heads to the King.

To the leopard's cage he came and put his hand in to stroke the beast. This it bore quietly, but edged away, looking up at him with wide eyes and kneading the ground. His boy Majesty was not satisfied; he drew the bolts of the door and opened it.

"He does not know fear," one of the men muttered and they rustled together. "He will when his sister hears of this," another said.

The little King stood in the doorway reaching his hand to the leopard, which drew back into a corner and rubbed itself against the bars. He called to it petulantly and laughed at it, and the leopard spat and crouched and sprang. The King went down with its body upon him, its claws on his shoulders, and he screamed as he fell.

Silvain sprang too. His left hand was at the leopard's throat, he bore back the fangs and the snarling head, his dagger struck at the heart. Tearing the

boy's doublet from his lean shoulders the leopard fell back and lay writhing and clawing at the air.

Silvain set the little King on his legs again, and holding an arm about him said gently, "Here is no hurt, my lord."

The King was shaking, the King was crying, "Oh, oh, he is dead!" he stamped his foot. "You killed him, you."

Silvain looked at the still, lithe body, "It is true. He has his deliverance," he said. "Do not grieve for him, my lord."

"Wretch! I hate you. He was my leopard," the King sobbed.

A man ran up with his hand on his sword. "Stand from the King, sirrah," he cried. Silvain knew the hard face of the knight of the donkey and the walnuts.

"Trémoille!" the King ran to him. "He has killed my leopard, my leopard that cousin Louis promised me."

"I saw the deed, sir," Trémoille measured Silvain with shrewd cold eyes.

"He is a rogue. Tell your men to take him. Oh, he must hang for it. My leopard, that I——"

He broke off. He was aware of his sister. Madame Anne came sedately, a small woman in meek black and white. "You have made me fear for you, my lord. I pray you think of yourself." Her voice was humble and plaintive. She looked at the King and he flushed and looked down and shifted his feet. She kept her eyes steady upon him and made a little quick gesture to the palace.

The King muttered, "It was my leopard, my leopard that cousin Louis promised me," and shambled off.

"God has watched over him this day," said Madame Anne. "But alas, others have not." She turned to the Sieur de la Trémoille. "How came this wild beast in the palace, sir?"

"The King has said, madame. It was a present to

him from the Duke of Orleans. Doubtless they both hoped much of the beast."

"But not this," said Madame Anne smoothly. "Who is he that killed it?"

Silvain stood forward. "I had the fortune, madame."

"You come from Monseigneur d'Orleans?"

"Not I, who never saw him nor his. I am a knight out of Normandy, Silvain de St. Lo, to serve the King, and I bear a letter to you, madame, from the Bishop of Avranches." He bent his knee and gave it her.

She looked at him over the seal. "Silvain de St. Lo," she repeated. "You are young, sir."

"I have the more life to serve you, madame."

She read the letter while Trémoille studied him keenly. "My good lord of Avranches commends you to the King's grace," she said, lifting her grave, pale eyes to Silvain. "I doubt not it shall serve you."

"I ask only to serve the King, madame."

"It is in my mind that there is forfeiture and outlawry against the blood of St. Lo."

"My father's wrong is dead in my father's grave. I claim nothing but to serve."

"You are wise in your youth. But in his age your father gave no true service to the King my father."

"God is the judge between them this day, madame. I have no fear."

Trémoille laughed. "That is true, at least. He has no fear." Silvain made him a bow.

But Madame Anne took no heed. Her white, lifeless face looked up at Silvain: "The King will consider of your plea," she said and turned away to the palace. "Come, Trémoille."

Silvain bowed low as she went, but he was erect again to see M. de la Trémoille look back at him. That did not trouble him.

"You are not lucky, sir," said one of the grave men. "She is her father's daughter, la Grande Madame."

"Sir, let us not blame her for that. I have none to blame this day, for I have had honour beyond my merit." And then he went away and prayed at the cave of St. Gatien and afterwards in the abbey of Marmoutier knelt before the flask of holy oil which the angel gave to St. Martin to anoint his bruises.

So happy he came to dine at the inn in the marketplace. But Messire Thibaut was not there. Silvain had eaten, he was sitting in the shade of a green alley reading a written book of his mother's prayers, when Thibaut showed his dark face flushed and giggling. "What news have you, my lord, for there is never a baby in Tours has none," he panted and stretched himself at Silvain's feet.

"Why, brother, this is a kind world to me," said Silvain mildly, "and lets me not lack honour."

"Say you so!" Thibaut sucked his teeth. "And do we fight for this little King and his great sister?"

"I think they will not have it so. For they do not like me, brother."

Thibaut slapped his thigh. "God save them, they are kind, as the cat said when the dogs drove her into the dairy. How long will this little King last, my lord?"

"Fie, brother, you talk treason."

"So does every poor soul in Tours. For they say that Madame Anne has quarrelled with the Duke of Orleans and all the great lords and arrayed them against her baby King. They are gone to Amboise and gather their strength against Madame and the boy. And this morning the Duke sent a leopard in a cage to the King, which was, as some say, a challenge to show Madame her little King as that leopard was, but others swear that he designed the leopard should kill the boy who is——"

"That I will not believe, brother," Silvain said quickly. "I take no pleasure to believe that a man is base."

Thibaut grinned. "But under which banner do we fight, my lord?"

"No banner is raised yet," Silvain said. "Wait and watch."

Thibaut chuckled. "Why stand ye here all the day idle? Because no man hath hired me. And would not Madame hire you, my lord?"

"Have patience, brother," Silvain said. "I see fortune."

A day and another day they waited in Tours but no word came to Silvain from the King. Then he said, "Here is little courtesy. I think they have not learnt to love me," and he took horse.

This much pleased Messire Thibaut who, as they rode out of Tours, wagged his long head and said: "Woe to thee, oh land, when the King is a child. That is scripture."

"You are like a raven, brother. When you are happy, you croak," said Silvain gently.

"I think you have no ear, as the donkey said to the nightingale. This was music of joy, my lord. For you have taken the winning side, which you never did yet."

Silvain stared at him. "Good faith, you are hard to please. We have ridden on many a venture and lost none."

"And gained nothing that a man cannot carry on his back."

Silvain laughed. "Do not fear. I am hungry, too. I must have lands and lordship for my name. For that was I made. Do not fear. I have no mercy on this world."

CHAPTER VIII

THE KING'S COUSIN

SO they made for Amboise.

But they had not found a short road to fortune, for when to Amboise they came, the Duke of Orleans was not there, nor any other lord. Then they had better news that he was gathering a great array at Châteaudun, and making off thither came to grass land on which there were foot races and horse races and a merry company of men, and over all was a banner blazoned with a red porcupine.

Then Messire Thibaut goggled his eyes. "Here be peaceful folk," he groaned. "By my grandam, this is paltry, as the boy said when the girls stayed kissing each other. Alas, my lord, where is our venture now? We have come from a child to a child." For the porcupine was the badge of the Duke of Orleans.

But Silvain looked and smiled and already he was opening his breastplate. "You are a man of war, brother," he said. "Stay you with the armour. But I love a man who is gay. Here is good pastime."

He went across the meadows, a lithe, long fellow in his doublet and hose, pleasant to see. Where a foot race was starting he lingered a moment, but the runners were lads, pages or squires at the oldest, and he passed on to the larger, lordlier company gathered about a stream. It wandered through the meadows some five or ten yards wide and where it was narrowest they held a jumping match.

A busy youth, slight and well shaped, with a round laughing face, was marshalling them and challenging those that hung back with a flood of noisy mockery.

By his noise, by his eagerness, by his little head, Silvain knew him for the Duke of Orleans. When he had drawn up a long line, and the older and the haughtier men had made good their claim to stand out, he took his place at the head, and led off, jumping well, clearing the water with something to spare and shouting his triumph. And Silvain came last, none heeding him. There were disasters and the Duke made merry at each splash. Then all who had made the jump must jump back again after him where the stream was wider. So more of them had a wetting and the Duke enjoyed himself vastly and turned again for a jump still longer, and men began to take note of Silvain. For though many had fallen in and fallen out, that long, unknown knight who came last was there still and jumping as far as the Duke, a strange, shameful thing. And now only he and the Duke were left, and if they were to jump again they must clear some seven yards of water and none knew if His Highness could do it and the ritual of His Highness's sport was that he should win. This the long stranger seemed not to know, for he tossed back his fair hair and smiled and took his place for another jump and waited for the Duke, who had his breath to find.

"Will you fling your heart over that, friend?" the Duke called to him.

"I dare not turn back where you lead, my lord."

So the Duke had to set himself to it and landed on the edge of the bank and fell into the water on his back. Then Silvain ran and, jumping over him through the spray that he made, cleared the stream and turned and hauled him out.

"By my faith, that was worth a wet skin to see," the Duke clapped him on the back. "You are a man of my own make. And now I look at you, who the devil are you, you are none of mine."

"I pray you do not say so, my lord. For I have ridden far to follow you. I am Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of Normandy."

"No, faith, a knight of Orleans this day," the Duke cried and linked arms with him. "There is man's blood in you. Come, we will go to horse and show these fellows who cannot jump how to ride." He peered up at Silvain's placid face and laughed and called to his muttering household on the further bank. "Follow who can, we will show you a lead."

His Highness made for a tent which was pitched with hangings of cloth of gold and therein Silvain had the honour to hold out dry breeches for him as he changed and to drink a cup of Vouvray with him. This swift prosperity could be seen to displease the gentlemen of His Highness's Court, who when their master came out with his new favourite stood together and made one another laugh.

His Highness was also merry. "Saddle, saddle, you rogues," he said and shouted a hunting call. There were two horses by his tent, a huge grey charger which the groom had to gentle and a chestnut mare standing like a statue, a sleek pretty creature. "Take the lady, friend," says he and sprang on the grey. Silvain was slower, looked at stirrups and girth and bit. The mare arched her neck and nuzzled into him. She let him mount and stood. The Duke who was making his charger twist and turn in all the devices of the lists cried out: "By my faith, you are no knight for a lady!" Silvain touched her with his heel. She reared, she came down and tried to throw him over her head. She flung her head up and bolted.

Then there was a round of cheers and his Highness loudest. She swerved from the crowd and made for the stream. Her mouth was iron against the bit, he could not steady her, but on the very brink she drove in her hoofs and refused. Silvain set his heels at her ribs heartily. She turned and made for the tent. He wrenched her head round and held her at the merry crowd. It broke and scattered and he drove her on and on till she was reeking and blown, then he took her

over the brook where it was widest and turned her and made her jump again and so came back with her to where His Highness waited still cheering him gaily.

"You are gracious, my lord," Silvain said. "I must ask your pardon. I fear I have spoilt your sport."

"Look how he puts me down again!" his Highness laughed to his gentlemen, but they smiled sourly. "You are a man in a thousand, my Silvain. Come ride with me. We will mark out a course for these gentle gallants to race."

And they were about it, His Highness zealously choosing jumps where there was good hope that horses would go down, when Silvain saw men in armour riding on the road. "This is other work, I think," said Silvain. "Who comes here, my lord?"

His Highness looked and groaned. "It is the devil my cousin," he said. A short, square knight was making across the meadows.

"God's body, Louis, why are you here?" he cried as he came.

It seemed to Silvain that the little round face of His Highness had the look of a child who means to be naughty. "Why, for sport, cousin. It has been a merry day, but you are not too late yet. You may ride in the hunting race."

"I think we have another race to ride," said Count Dunois. "By St. Airt, you are not fair with me, Louis. You should have been at Châteaudun of Sunday and with all your power." He looked round the meadow. "What! Have you mustered no more than these?"

"There are more at Château Renault," the Duke said sulkily. "I have enough."

"And so you can make holiday! Name of God, Louis, you have chosen war and you must throw all in or you are shamed."

"Fie, how you scold!" the Duke cried. "Hark you, cousin, when we ride in arms, I shall not be behind Dunois. But we shall have no war. Once the boy is

in my hands, Madame Anne is undone. And that will be soon. Alain D'Albret has a trick to bring him down."

"The devil take D'Albret and all his tricks," Dunois cried. "I have no mind to your friends, my lord."

"Then make a new one," the Duke laughed and looked again like a naughty child. "Here is the best knight in France," and he reined back to Silvain's side.

"I have seen a thousand of them," says Dunois, staring at Silvain. "How did you come by this one, Louis?"

"He put me down, cousin. Which you have been trying to do all your days. You should love him."

Silvain bowed. "If I may fight beside Dunois it is enough."

"Faith, you have chosen in a new kind this time, Louis," Dunois frowned. "And what brought you over to us, sir?"

"Sir, I ride for the honour of a good venture."

"And he had it, cousin. See, I put him on Diane and he is there still," the Duke laughed.

Dunois shrugged his shoulders. "He is St. George, I suppose. Ride on, my lord, in God's name. I have enough to say to you."

But the Duke was fractious, the Duke was perverse. He would have his race and when he had had his race, he would ride with Silvain and talk to him of horse and hound, of tilting and sword play and make much of him. And his gentlemen looked sour, and Count Dunois sourest of all, and at this the Duke was merry. So they came to Château Renault.

Silvain was bidden live in the castle. He turned back to give Messire Thibaut news of him and found that lean man chaffering for a lodging with a saddler's wife. At the chestnut mare Thibaut made grimaces. "What shall be done to the man whom the king delighted to honour? That is scripture," Thibaut put up an eyebrow.

"Indeed he cannot do without me, brother," Silvain smiled.

"And the other could not do with you. Boys will be boys, as the girl said when she married. But here is quick fortune! God help you, my lord, I fear for you. You begin to be lucky. How will you bear it?"

"I shall not fail, brother. I see far."

And indeed His Highness did delight to honour Silvain as they drank and sang in the castle that night. For he set him on his right hand where the Count of Angoulême should have been and talked to him instead of to Dunois, who was on his left. Therefore the Count of Angoulême and the great lords rose from the table early as men affronted, and when Dunois tried to take his Highness away to make amends, he was answered petulantly and went alone. "My lord, I do you ill service if you lose old friends for me," Silvain said gently.

"Let them go to the devil. They have never brought me good. Hold by me and I will hold by you, Silvain," says His Highness. The wine flowed and they sat late.

But Silvain was up betimes and saw men getting to horse in the courtyard, some half-dozen who were lightly armed and with them the swarthy, short knight whom he knew as D'Albret. Silvain went on to Thibaut's lodging and as he went saw that the Sieur D'Albret had taken the road to Amboise.

All was well with Messire Thibaut and Silvain shared his breakfast of salted venison. But while he ate, men came into the house and were talking with the saddler's wife.

"It is merry where you lodge, brother," Silvain said.

"Alas, my lord, the woman is comely," Thibaut rolled his eyes, "but a good woman else."

The noise grew. "I do not praise these gallants," said Silvain. "I think they are not nice." There was movement and a fall. The woman screamed.

Silvain came downstairs. He saw her handled

among a party of gentlemen of the castle. One went this way and another that, hitting the floor to their surprise, and Silvain came to her and set her behind him. "You are in the wrong," he said. "This is your sister."

"Here is the footboy!" one of them cried. "Have at him."

Silvain had no arms but his dagger, there were half a dozen of them and some carried swords. He picked up a chair and fought with it, drawing back to the stair. The woman ran up and from the windows above Messire Thibaut and she cried to the townfolk. Craftsmen and prentices tumbled out of their shops with tools and staves and pikes and the gentlemen broke off the fight and ran.

"God's faith, they are not gentle," Silvain said, for he was very angry. He would not stay for the thanks of the saddler nor the saddler's wife, he made haste to the castle to seek those ungentle gentlemen.

But as he came to the gate another party met him, the Duke's provost and a guard of archers, and the provost laid hands on him and said "Sir Silvain, you are my prisoner."

"Am I so?" Silvain laughed. "Who told you that?"

"It is an order," the provost said sulkily. "It is the order of the Count of Angoulême."

"What, do you take orders of any but the Duke? Bring me to His Highness. We are his men, you and I."

So into the hall they marched and there the Duke sat with the great lords close about him, shifting and fretting like a spoilt child. Then the Count of Angoulême cried out, "Why do you bring the knave here? Away with him."

"Who speaks against me?" Silvain said quickly. "Let him speak and I have his answer. But I am your knight, my lord," he set his eyes on the Duke, "and I hold by you."

The Duke tossed in his chair and muttered.

"Will you suffer this, my lord?" Angoulême cried. "The rogue struck down my son and raised the town upon him. God's blood, if I have no justice on the knave's body, I am done with you."

"If your son has fought with me this day, he was one of six who took sword to a naked man. Such a knight is he. And what he fought for was to do violence to a woman. Such a knight is he."

"This is beyond all! He lies, my lord, like a knave he lies."

Silvain laughed. "You have said. Who pays the forfeit? Who will come against me to uphold you speak true?"

The great lords broke out upon him. He was impudent, he was a shameless rogue, he was vermin. But Dunois growled out, "It is a challenge. He is in his right," and he stared frowning at Silvain.

"He! A nameless man, no man's son!" Angoulême raged. "Honour of God, my lord, must I bid you choose between him and me?"

His Highness looked at Silvain and looked away. His Highness was peevish and shrill. "Why the devil should you brawl?" he said. "All this work about a woman!"

"A girl in the town," Angoulême sneered. "One of his own kind."

"An honest man's wife," Silvain said.

Angoulême laughed. "His sister, he called her. Honest wench and honest man."

"Why, my lord, to a true knight every woman but one is his sister. Good faith, did you never learn that till now?"

But that made an end of his cause. They were all jeering at him. "God help us, must you preach?" the Duke cried. "That is worst of all. Away with him, Hugo. Shut him up and give us peace."

In a cell where the light came through a long loop-

hole Silvain had leisure to meditate upon the royal nature of His Highness of Orleans. He had been fed and it was late and the day was fading out of that cell when the provost, Hugo of Gien, turned the key in the door and came in. The provost had drunk wine, the provost was sportive. In this style: arms akimbo, thick of speech, "Why now, you look as sad as a dying dog! Bear up, lad, you have many a day to bear. The Duke has forgot you already. And when he forgets——" the Provost made a sound like the gurgle of an empty bottle. "Faith, you had a short day. I never knew a fellow that made so little of his luck." The provost laughed in his chest. "Dear child, to hear you preach at Angoulême! That was rare!"

"I am glad to make you merry," said Silvain and stood up.

"Bless your sweet innocence! It was himself that set his fellows to pick a quarrel with you. Why, darling, the thing was all planned to put you down because you took his lordship's place at table."

"But that is not my shame," said Silvain gently.

"By my body, I call it shame to be a goose. But what the devil brought you to throw for my lord's favour? That is no game for you, sweet chuck."

"Indeed, you are right," Silvain said and struck at his jaw. He fell and he lay, and before his strength came back to him he was tied up in his own girdle and his scrip was thrust into his mouth. Then Silvain took his keys and opened the door and stole out and locked it again. On the stair he lingered scanning the courtyard. It was twilight and few men were there. He went out by the stables, came into the courtyard again by another archway and so made for the gate and out, none challenging him.

Thibaut was disturbed as he sat at supper with the saddler and the saddler's wife by a whistle that he knew. He came out to find Silvain with their own two horses and the mare Dragon. "Mount and ride, brother,"

Silvain said in his ear, "I am gone by the road to Amboise," and he went off on the mare.

He was a mile out of the town when Thibaut caught him up with his mail clattering on the led horse. Then he stopped and put on breastplate and thigh pieces and buckled on his sword. "Brrr, this wind is cold," said Thibaut. "I think it has changed. What shall be done to the man that the King delighted to honour? Do you know yet, my lord?"

"Here is no king nor honour, brother. We have both to win. Ride on."

"Into the dark," Thibaut grumbled. "It is your joy, but, by my body, it is not mine, as the hen said to the fox when he ate her."

CHAPTER IX

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SIEUR D'ALBRET

ALL night they rode and at dawn slept in the woods, and coming over the river into Amboise there sought news of a short swarthy knight who rode with some half-dozen men. They heard of him on the road to Tours. They found him at nightfall in a village in the forest, but he had shed some of his men.

"I have good fortune to find you, Sir Alain," Silvain smiled.

"So have not I," said the Sieur D'Albret, glowering at him. "What have you to do here, my gallant?"

"I seek honour with you."

The Sieur D'Albret swore. "I have no work for your page-boy tricks. The Duke is mad to send you into this."

Silvain looked down. "Sir, I dare not say you are wrong," said he modestly. "But I will do my endeavour that His Highness shall not forget me."

"Do you know what venture this is?" D'Albret drew close.

"Why, sir, yes," Silvain opened his eyes. "You ride to seize the King."

"Speak soft, fool. Mark me now. This is no boy's sport. If we win, Madame Anne will raise the devil to hang you. And if we lose, I will send you to the devil by my own hand." He laughed. "Now will you venture? Go play your games with the Duke, boy."

"Alas, my lord, if I go back there is no honour for me," Silvain said. "I must do as I can."

So in the morning they rode together into the forest, a grim and silent company, for the Sieur D'Albret

would speak neither of his plans nor anything else, and like a surly dog he watched Silvain and Thibaut. They made towards Tours, but halted at noon in a covert of bracken and there waited till two of the men whom D'Albret had shed came back to him. After much talk apart the two men went off again towards Tours, and D'Albret led his party back. That night they slept in the forest and at dawn rode westward again till they were not many miles from Tours. Then D'Albret made his men scatter and hide, but kept Silvain and Thibaut under his eye.

The plan was growing plain. From the time he could sit a horse the boy King had been sent hunting to cure his sickliness. He had learnt a passion for it, and rode hard and wild, and the Sieur D'Albret had a line ready for him to ride. The men who had been sent on came back trailing a drag of dirty bleeding flesh and made away towards Amboise. Soon Silvain heard horses moving through the coverts, but not many. The pack was waiting to be laid on and the field waiting with them while a few couple of tufters found and roused a stag. With the tufters rode the King's huntsmen and the King. The hounds worked through one covert and another, they found the scent of the drag and went off, and after them came the King at speed. "Turn them, my lord, turn them," the huntsman cried, spurring after him. "The devil knows what they have found."

One of D'Albret's men shot out of the covert and rode him down and took his horn and was gone, and in a moment that horn was sounding far away. D'Albret waited awhile till he heard the field and the pack moving off. Then he turned to Silvain and for the first time he smiled. "Now ride for your neck," he said and pointed on.

"I like this venture," Silvain said, and Thibaut and he and their three horses followed the King, and after them came D'Albret urging them on.

They found the King two miles away where the drag

ended, lashing his whip at puzzled hounds. D'Albret ranged alongside and caught his bridle. "Forward, sir, forward," he cried. "Your stag is running yet!"

"Let me be," the boy cried. "Villain, do you not know me? I am the King."

"I know you well, my lord," D'Albret laughed, "and I will show you a royal chase. As far as Orleans. Good faith, you need no hand on the bridle, you ride so well." He snatched the reins away and set the horse going.

"What are you doing with me?" the boy whimpered. "You are a wicked knave to serve me so. I am the King."

"God save you, you shall be King. I bring you to your cousin, Louis of Orleans. He will make you King indeed."

"Are you Louis's man?"

"Sir, he sent me for you. Trust me, you shall be with him to-morrow."

"I like Louis," the boy said. "But my sister will be angry."

"Your sister!" D'Albret laughed. "You are the King. You go where you will."

The boy laughed. "Madame will be very angry," he said and laughed again. But soon he was asking to have the reins in his hand and D'Albret would not trust him and he fell to scolding and whimpering.

They were mighty ill friends before they came to the river where D'Albret's men were waiting. The matter was not mended when the King found that the horses must swim the river. He raged, he flung himself out of the saddle and ran away and was brought back by the collar, a very wretched little King. "Play me that trick again and I will tie your feet together under his belly, God's blood I will," D'Albret stormed as he dumped the lad on the horse again. "The devil go with you all!" He shook his fist at his men. "Why do you sit gaping? Try back, look if we be followed, we have lost

too much time. Hold off who comes. And you," he scowled at the King, "you will be wet enough without crying. What a babe it is! You there," he called to Silvain, who was modestly aloof, "you do nothing for all your brag. Give him a lead!"

Silvain rode out and bowed to the King and looked at him full and set his horse at the water.

"Who is that knight?" the King gaped.

"Some beggar o' horseback," D'Albret said. "On, on. Where he goes, you can go safe."

The King said nothing and began to whimper again as the water came to his saddle. To cross was no great matter. The river was wide and the stream ran strong but not deep. The horses had not more than a few yards to swim here and there, and soon they were climbing the steep dyke on the northern shore.

D'Albret shouted to his men to follow and rode on toward Château Renault till dark. For some time the little King had been mourning that he was hungry and tired and cold, but so cold. They gave him what cloaks they had and dried venison and dried bread, they built him a fire and picketed their horses and he sighed himself to sleep. And when all were still Silvain stole away by the fire into the dark.

In the middle of the night D'Albret was wakened by heat and noise. He started up to see the undergrowth about them in flames and hear the horses stamp and whinny in the smoke.

Silvain was on his feet too. "By my faith, this has gone far enough," he said and called to Thibaut and ran to the horses. D'Albert kicked his men out of their sleep, but before he had them up and doing, the maddened horses had won free and were bolting away from the fire.

Through the rolling smoke Silvain and Thibaut hardly brought back their three and had much ado to quiet them and make them stand. D'Albret's men were scattered in the dark upon a hopeless chase. "Here is

strange fortune, sir," said Silvain gently. "Who could be ready for this?"

"The devil's own fortune," said D'Albret. "But praise God here is something saved. Up with you, lad, and drive the beasts back to us," and he shouted to his scattered men and cursed them. "Body of God, must you stay for a saddle?" For both Silvain and Thibaut were labouring with girths.

"What is he to do?" the little King whimpered. "Let us go, oh, let us go. The fire is upon us here."

"Bah, must you be whining!" D'Albret growled. "Ride, lad, ride." Thibaut swung to the saddle and moved off with the led horse. "What the devil do you want with two?" D'Albret cried. "Leave him to me, fool."

Silvain mounted and caught up the boy. "Neither horse nor man, by my faith," said he, and drove in his spurs and rode down the Sieur D'Albret and galloped off into the dark.

The little King laughed loud. "That was brave! Oh to see him go down. That was brave!"

"My lord, do not say so. He was afoot and unready. There is no honour in that."

"Fie, he was a villain. He laid hands on me. I hope you killed him."

"So do not I, my lord. For it was no fair fight."

"Why, you killed my leopard."

Silvain laughed. "Alas, my lord, you have not forgotten? And now I lay hands on you. What will you do to me for all?"

"I will have you fight for me," the boy said.

"Good faith, I ask no better." Silvain bent and kissed his hand.

Then they set him on the led horse and made for Tours.

In the morning when the town was near and their horses weary, a lad came riding to meet them and called to them to stand.

"Peace, brother. You know me," Silvain cried. "You are my fair boy of the river."

"Why, it is Bayard!" the King cried.

The boy took off his cap. "My lord! God be praised you are safe and free. Sir Silvain has great fortune."

"Were you sent to look for me?"

"No, my lord. They search the forest for you. But there are posts on all the northern roads watching for the Duke's army, and I have one."

"Oh, they do not look for me! I must look to myself, I. Well, ride in, Bayard, and tell Madame that I come."

The boy bowed and galloped away and they rode on past pickets of archers and men-at-arms, past a strong guard at the bridge head and over the long bridge into Tours, and it was cheering all the way. "This sounds of war, my lord," Silvain said.

"I should like to fight Louis," said the King.

So Silvain came back to that palace, but now the courtyard was full of armed men, and Trémoille, running out among them, had work to set them in such order that there was a way clear for the King.

He came to hold the King's horse. "Thank God you have escaped, sir. We——"

"It is a shame that I was taken," the boy said. "It is not by you I have escaped. Hold my horse, Silvain." Trémoille stood back and the little King came down into Silvain's arms. He had need of them.

"My lord, I have been in prayer for you all night," a low voice said. Madame Anne stood in the doorway, wan and grave.

"Prayers!" the boy laughed. "I have been fighting."

"Please you come in, my lord. Let me hear of it."

"Go in then. Why do we stand here? I am as tired as death."

Madame Anne bent her head and led the way and the boy tottered on Silvain's arm.

In the hall he flung himself into a chair and scowled at his sister. "You are wise, madame, are not you? Here you have all these knights-in-arms, but you let cousin Louis's men come into the forest and take me."

"My lord, you promised me that you would not ride alone. You had knights enough in your train. I am not pleased with you."

"Oh, you would be pleased if I was dead? But I am not to die to please you, madame. I have beaten them!" the boy laughed unsteadily. "Cousin Louis will be sad and sorry to-day. I beat his best men."

"Who took you, my lord?"

"I do not know them. A black knight was their leader. By my father's soul, he was a great strong knave and he had twenty as good as he. They took me while I was hunting and did not see them. I swam the Loire on my horse; for I thought to escape them so. But they were too many. When they halted and slept I got to my horse in the dark and broke through them and rode down the black knight and so away." He looked sideways at Silvain. "And this good fellow, he showed me the way back to Tours."

"I will give a golden cross to the altar of our Lady of Clery," said Madame Anne.

"Give me the gold, Anne," the boy grinned. "I did it. By my faith, it was a brave venture."

Madame Anne turned her pale eyes on Silvain. "You were with him, Sir Silvain de St. Lo?"

"The King has said, madame."

"What more do you know?"

"No more than the King, madame."

"What do you ask for your part?"

"What the King has promised. That I should fight in his cause."

"He is a good fellow," the King cried out. "I should like to see him fight Louis. He can ride with Trémoille. He rides much better. Oh, let him go. I

am so hungry." He beat upon the table and called peevishly to the servants.

"The King thanks you, sir," Madame Anne said, looking at Silvain. "You are in my remembrance."

It was worth at least a breakfast, as breakfasts went under the frugal rule of Madame Anne, and while he ate Trémoille came and sat beside him.

"You have made friends, sir," he smiled.

"Sir, I hope to make one more."

"I have no ill will. Nor good neither. For I cannot tell what man you are. But thus it is. I am bidden find some place for you, and no high place can I give. We march against the Duke of Orleans. Is your heart in it?"

"Sir, my heart and all of me. Let me ride behind you a lonely knight."

"You ask little," Trémoille stared at him.

"I do not ask what is not given," Silvain said.

Messire Thibaut, heavily asleep in the hay, was not pleased when Silvain climbed to the loft and called him to saddle.

"What ill have I done to you, quoth the dog to the flea," Thibaut groaned and cracked his jaws in a yawn. "Where do we go now, my lord?"

"We go to war, brother," Silvain said. "Make my shield bright."

"Whose war is this? I am dizzy. He must learn to fight his own tail who rides with you."

"We fight for the King."

"Good faith, is that all he gave you? Put not your trust in Princes, it is in the scripture."

"I ask no more, brother. For the King and for France I fight and so bring back my name to good renown."

Thibaut groaned. "What has your name done for you that you should labour for your name?"

"Why, brother, it is all that a man has at first and at

last. So is he made, it is only his name can live for ever here upon earth. I came into France with an outlaw's name. I bear the name of a knight of the King. Who knows what name I shall leave when I die?"

CHAPTER X

THE CHILD'S HONOUR

BEFORE that day was done the Sieur de la Trémoille led his array over the long bridge and marched north. He had a goodly muster of knights and mounted men, for though the great lords were with the Duke of Orleans or sulking in their own lands, those of less account were mindful that the old King had fostered them. But Trémoille's strength was in archers and men-at-arms on foot, levies of the people to whom the King was all, and soldiers of fortune who took the King's pay.

On the next day when they marched on from their bivouac they had news that the Duke was riding against them with a great company. Trémoille halted in the flat fields and set his order of battle where a stream made sodden ground in their front and mingling archers and spearmen in the centre he set his knights on either flank. The word went round that it was to be a fight without quarter.

"I will not spare you, said the stag to the hounds, as he lay in covert," Thibaut grimaced. "Surely this is a war of fools."

But Silvain frowned, and he said to the knight beside him, "Sir, that was no gallant word."

"Trémoille fights keen, sir. He fights to win."

The Duke's array came on fast, all mounted men in a broad stream of glittering steel. It halted out of bowshot, it came into line and was arrayed in two divisions. Trumpets pealed and the smaller band moved away to the flank and swung hither and thither and on a sudden rode at the horsemen guarding Trémoille's right.

"That is Dunois," Silvain said. "He comes on nobly." He kept his knights together, the charge crashed home on men who tried in vain to gather speed to meet the shock and drove them headlong in disarray.

"By my faith, that was masterly done," said Silvain. "Let him turn now and charge the footmen. Oh, my lord, where is your trumpet? Turn or you fail your fortune."

"Which side are you on, sir?" says the knight beside him.

"Why, sir, I like to see a fight well fought."

That wing was broken utterly and Dunois's horsemen pursued it till themselves were scattered and far away. But in good heart from their success the second band of the Duke's array came on and charged at the footmen.

"This is the great attack, sir. God give us strength! This is the Duke himself."

"He is in haste," said Silvain sadly.

And indeed his knights came so fast that their line was broken before the arrows found them and beat down man and horse. The sodden ground checked them and in disorder, not with the weight of one blow, they came upon the spearmen. The spears stood fast and they were checked and held.

Some still tried to thrust through, others drew off to make ground for another charge and the trumpet sounded a rally. While they were falling back scattered over the fields Trémoille led his unbroken horsemen upon them. They could not gather together, they could not make speed to meet the shock, they were shattered and swept away.

Dunois rode back with a little weary company and found a lost fight and charged on boldly to save what he could. But Trémoille had his horsemen still in hand and they rode down that charge and then the footmen broke rank and ran in to beat down the dismounted and kill the fallen and strip the dead.

Messire Thibaut rode on to the field with slow and melancholy dignity and stared through the sunset light. "Now where are you gone, child, as the hen said to the gosling. God be with you, are you changing sides again? It is the hour you would choose." And he looked in vain for the shield with the golden star and very sadly began to plunder.

Silvain was far off then charging with two or three a little band of the Duke's knights who had turned on the pursuit to bring their master off. They did loyally, but through the clash Silvain rode and left the dismounted to fight out their fight and followed the Duke.

"Sir, will you fall to a blow in the back?" he cried as he came up.

The Duke swerved, saw but the one man and turned upon him. Silvain drove his horse on, stooping low over its neck and holding his sword like a lance. The Duke was hurled from the saddle. Silvain sprang down and knelt beside him. "Do you yield yourself, my lord?" But the Duke made no answer. Silvain opened his vizor and laid bare the little face red and drenched with sweat. "I know you well, my lord. And you know me." He opened his own helmet.

Then the Duke swore at him for a treacherous rogue.

"Alas, my lord, that is not fit for you to say nor me to hear," Silvain said gently.

Then the Duke laughed and said that it was trick for trick and Silvain had put him down. "Come, mount me and let us be gone. By my faith, you are the best knight in France, and I will make you as rich as any."

"Here is no trick, my lord," said Silvain sadly. "I am the King's knight and I have taken you this day. Do you yield yourself?" He stood up and picked up his sword.

"Villain, would you kill me where I lie?"

"Many a knight of yours has been killed this day. But I kill no prisoners."

"I am your prisoner," the Duke cried.

Silvain knelt and raised him. "My lord, I pray that you have no hurt."

The Duke's gilt armour was scarred and smirched with dust and blood. "To the devil with your prayers," he said. "But hear me now, friend. I am your prisoner, not the King's."

"My lord, I am the King's and all of mine."

"Villain, you mean my death."

"God forbid, my lord."

But while they talked there came down upon them a company of the footmen who had taken horses and were seeking more booty.

"Go your way, brothers," Silvain called. "Here is nothing for you. I am a knight of the King's and this my prisoner."

"A cheat! A cheat! The King takes no prisoners. No quarter this day."

Silvain sprang on his horse as they made at him and drew aside and then crashed into them crying, "For the King, for the King." The weight of him in his armour clove into them and he laid about him with good will. He beat down one and another, he scattered them and caught a horse and brought it to the Duke. "I pray you, my lord, mount and ride. Here is no safety."

"Where shall I go?" the Duke mourned. "There is no safety anywhere for me."

"By my faith, I will bring you safe to the King."

"You bring me safe to my death! For the love of God, Silvain, join with me now and let us ride for Châteaudun and I will give you lands to your desire."

"Let us forget that is said, my lord," Silvain said gently. "Ride on."

So through the dusk and the night they found the road to Tours and weary horses and weary men came into the town when the sun was high. The Duke rode with his vizor down, but Silvain's head was bare and his eyes shone.

In the hall of the palace the Sieur de la Trémoille

told of his victory to the King and the King's sister and the court, a proud man that day. "So it has gone, my lord. There is but one army now and that the King's. There is but one power in France and that the King's." He knelt and kissed the boy's hand. "My lord, I thank you this was given me to do."

Madame Anne sat still watching him with grave eyes. But the little King laughed. "Was it bloody, Trémoille?"

"Some have died for you, my lord. And many who came against you lie dead."

"Is Cousin Louis killed?" the boy asked eagerly.

"His body is not on the field. I think that he has fled."

"You could not catch him?"

"His captains are taken, my lord. We have Dunois and the Count of Angoulême and——"

"Alive? Madame said I had no need of prisoners. Did you not say so, madame?"

There was a murmur among the grave men at the council table. "God forbid," said the Archbishop of Tours.

"God forbid that we should be quick to shed blood," said Madame Anne. "The Duke of Orleans has escaped then? You have taken the cubs, Trémoille, but the wolf is away."

There was a murmur at the door of the hall and Silvain's voice came clear. "Here is one whom the King would have. Open to him."

"Why, that is my man Silvain calls," the boy cried and started from his seat. "Open, yes, open."

Madame Anne looked at Trémoille, who laughed. "This is not of me, madame. God knows what the fellow has done now."

Silvain came leading by the hand the Duke. Still he kept his vizor down, and as he dragged himself along, bent under the weight of his smirched armour, none knew him.

"Why, Silvain, what foul fellow have you brought me?" the little King cried.

Silvain knelt before him. "My lord, I bring you the Duke of Orleans, who is your prisoner and craves your grace."

"Cousin Louis!" the boy laughed shrill. "Oh, Cousin Louis, are you taken? Show yourself, Cousin Louis."

The Duke put up his vizor. "Mock me, my lord," he muttered. "That is noble," and he looked about him and saw Madame Anne and scowled at her.

"You stand bold in your treason," she said softly and she smiled.

Then Silvain said, "My lord, I have taken him who was your enemy. Say if I have earned some honour of you."

"That was good service," said Madame Anne. "It shall not lack honour."

"I pray you, give him his life," said Silvain. "That only I ask."

A faint flush came into madame's wan cheeks and her eyes flickered.

The grave men at the council table looked at each other. "God forbid that he should die," the Archbishop said. "He has yielded himself."

"We will not hang you, cousin, no," the little King laughed.

"God forbid that we should be swift to shed blood," said Madame Anne. "Why does the man kneel?"

"To thank my lord for this great honour," said Silvain and bowed low and went out.

When he had eaten and was lying down to sleep in a little bare room off the guard-room there came to him the page Bayard and said that the Sieur de la Trémoille asked for him.

Trémoille sat at ease in a loose gown and laughed. "Why, is it you have found him? Look at him well, Bayard, that you may never be like him."

"Sir, do not mock me," Bayard said. "I know well I shall not be such as he is. For he is the most noble knight that serves the King."

"Go your ways," Trémoille waved him out. "So you please a child, friend," he sneered.

Silvain smiled. "God forgive me if I am too proud of that," he said gently.

"Your pride has little meat. What the devil do you want of the world? You have broken yourself this day. You might have had a King's ransom for that fool's head and you must bring him in and ask his life. That is what Madame Anne will never forgive you if you live a thousand years."

"It is in my mind that I have the more honour," Silvain said.

Trémoille sat frowning and smiling. "Good faith, I cannot tell what you are. Is it a saint in arms or a fool, Silvain?"

"Sir, I am a lonely knight who seeks honour and fortune."

"Fortune!" Trémoille laughed. "You have more ways to lose it than ever I knew."

"Yet the child gave me honour," Silvain said gently.

CHAPTER XI

WOLF OF THE MOUNTAIN

AND after these things Sir Silvain de St. Lo turned from France and took the road to Italy. For he had hope, like other men of the sword from Hannibal to Napoleon, to make that land serve him. Folks told him that it was a land of gold and ivory, where each and all had their hearts' desire of pleasure and would give rich honour to a knight who guarded their paradise. Silvain led Thibaut, his squire, on an invasion.

But Messire Thibaut shivered and groaned. Who goes to Italy by land must go among mountains. They had chosen the easiest pass in all the Alps, but that way by Mont Genèvre, the road of many armies, takes a man through the crags and the snow of Dauphiny. It was early summer and out of the rocks gentian glowed and the rosy stars of saxifrage. Thibaut had no joy in that. Thibaut huddled himself in the keen wind. Thibaut lifted his eyes to the jagged peaks above the glacier, sharp as saw teeth against the blue light of the sky and wriggled his unshorn face. "Who says that hell is under the earth? It is there, it is there," he moaned. "Who says that hell is hot? It is cold, cold as my feet. I am the man in the scripture, I fear that which is high."

"Courage, brother," Silvain laughed. "Now we go down."

Thibaut cried out in anguish. They had come over the top of the Col du Lautaret, they saw the track wind away into dark gulfs and vanish. "Our Mother help us, it is worse to look down than to look up."

"See the rich valley opening beyond. We shall be in a kind land soon."

Thibaut reined up his horse. "I was almost in it then," he shuddered. "My lord, where is your vinegar?" Silvain stared at him. "The Lord Hannibal when he crossed the mountains took vinegar to melt them. A wise man he. But, oh, my poor head, what a salad!" He dismounted and began to lead his horse, not without reason, for the track was steep and of rough rock and the zigzags were sharp and from the outer edge a man might fall a hundred feet or a thousand. But Silvain rode on fast. "Go your ways, you have always rare luck with your neck," said Messire Thibaut. "But I never had any to waste." And he followed like a dog on a grating.

The track twisted this way and that down the mountain side. Silvain was hidden, came into sight, was lost again. Thibaut looked down over bare crags to a dark pine forest and drew back and huddled himself and his horse into the rock wall. Faintly he heard a din from below, the scrambling of hoofs and shouts and the crash of a fall. "Pity me! Here is comfort for a poor man," Thibaut groaned. "What is it like when it happens, brother? I have fallen a thousand times in my heart."

And then he heard Silvain shout, "St. Denis to aid! Fight! Fight it yet!"

"God help you, what are you at now?" Thibaut groaned and tied his horse to a rock and lay down and wriggled his head over the edge of the precipice.

Far below where the track climbed out of the forest a column of laden mules was halted and in and out among the mules there was fighting. The muleteers were attacked from the head and the rear of their column by two little bands of men, and though they had rallied against the first party and stood together sturdily they fared ill behind where they were scattered. It was a fight of daggers and body to body and men were

thrust off the narrow track to fall sheer and swift to an unseen death or cling helpless and desperate to the crags.

On this struggle Silvain came headlong, shattered the first band of robbers by the crash of his onset, sprang from his horse and saved it and went on afoot crying, "St. Denis to aid! France! France! For the King!"

Messire Thibaut shouted so that the mountains echoed, "France! France!" and he put his hands to his mouth and made a noise like a trumpet call. What were left of the robbers could be seen wavering at this sudden fierce knight and the sounds of other force behind him. "Not sure yet, my children?" said Thibaut and he took the crossbow from his back and set a bolt to the string. "Oh, mother, is it the bolt or myself I shoot?" he groaned as he wriggled arms and shoulders over the edge. That bolt did no man any hurt, for it hit the rock above the mules and fell down among them spent. But its coming made fear, for the robbers, looking anxiously up to see what more was upon them, heard Thibaut shout, "Bowmen! Line the road and pick them off, the knaves." Another bolt he shot and saw the robbers break from Silvain's eager sword and abandon the track and plunge away like chamois over the rocks and out of sight. "God save them, poor souls, what a life is theirs!" said Thibaut and stood up shaking.

But when he came down to the place of the fight he was in the saddle and he rode with an air, head back, iron cap over one eye, hand on hip. "Good faith, my lord, I blame you," he said. "This is a little matter and not worth your care."

Silvain laughed and turned to the leader of the mule train, an old fellow of some bulk and dignity. "Here is the man who saved you, friend. It is my squire Thibaut, who is all my force."

"Is it possible?" the old fellow stared. "You are well served, sir. So you should be. For you are a

knight of a quick high courage." And he went off to make his men busy in hauling their fallen comrades on the rock face up to the track again.

"Kiss my foot, said the sheep to the shepherd," Thibaut grimaced. "Who is this mule driver that plays the lord to us?"

"He is a great man, brother," Silvain smiled. "He is a merchant out of Italy and he brings gifts from the Duke of Milan to the King."

The old merchant had a clear head and a masterful will; his men worked for him eagerly. The fallen who had not gone to their death were soon up in safety, loads shifted so that they could ride, the whole train marshalled and ready to move.

He came bustling back to Silvain. "This is wicked work, sir. I have lost two mules over the cliff. One laden with silk of Syria, one with silver from Florence."

"Oh, evil day, brother," Thibaut groaned. "Woe is me that you are alive to tell it."

The old man stared at him. "I take you to witness this was done by brigands and in the realm of France."

"We have seen, friend," Silvain said. "March on and I will bring you safe through the mountains to Grenoble."

The old man shook his head. "I venture no more. I go back to Briançon. If that is your way, ride with me and I will thank you for it."

"Friend, you owe me nothing," said Silvain. "Follow me and I will bring you safe."

The old merchant saluted him gravely by way of answer and he rode on, Messire Thibaut at his left hand. Not till they had gone some distance were the mules started, and then the old fellow took his place at the rear of the column with every man who had not a mule to drive marshalled as his guard.

But they had no more alarms. Out of the fragrant gloom of the pines they came safe down into the valley

and saw green pasture again and peaceful tilled land and at last houses where the castle of Le Monêtier guarded the pass. There was no challenge from the tower and they went on faster by an easier road till the walls of Briançon rose before them, where valleys and rivers meet.

Then the old man drove his mule on, spoke with the guard at the gate and passed them in and they climbed the steep street where the water races by the houses and came to the castle.

The Governor of Dauphiny was a burly ruddy soldier. He sat in his hall jovial among his gentlemen. But at the sight of the old merchant his mirth was ended in a roar. "Master Cosimo! God's body, Master Cosimo, what the devil brings you here again? Is the King to wait on your silly pleasure? You should have been thirty miles away to-night."

"You speak truth, my lord," said the merchant coldly.

"I thank you!" the governor laughed. "Here is gracious courtesy! And what do you speak, in God's name? What are you doing, old snail? And what fellows are these you bring me?"

"A knight of France and his squire who have done your King good service this day."

"The devil burn your impudence! That is for me to judge, not you."

"Judge then, my lord," the merchant said coldly. "I led out my train on the road to Grenoble and when I came to the castle at Le Monêtier men challenged me in the name of the Constable."

A gaunt grizzled man cried out, "It is an old order, my lord, it is my right and duty."

"I am glad that the Constable of Le Monêtier is here," the merchant said. "I told his men who I was and they offered me a guard through the mountains."

The Constable licked his lips. "Why, sir, do you complain of that?"

"They asked a price," Master Cosimo smiled. "A hundred crowns I was to pay or no guard for me."

The Governor turned upon the Constable. "Is this your right? Go hang yourself for a greedy knave."

"By your leave, my lord, I have an ancient right to toll on all goods which travel that way."

"The fiend take you and your tolls! Do you levy on the King's goods?"

"God forbid!" the Constable wiped his brow. "My rogues have done me a wrong. But how should they know the man served the King? He is an Italian and a close cunning fellow. I will be sworn they took him for a rogue merchant who would cheat them of their dues."

"I think I speak plain, my lord," said Master Cosimo. "I said that I would pay no Frenchman to guard the goods of the King of France. And they bade me go hang. It was not in my mind that the Governor could not keep the roads of his province safe."

"Can I not?" the Governor beat upon the table.

"You do not. For as we came out of the forest near the summit of the pass a band of robbers broke upon us and six of my men are wounded and three thrown over the cliff to their death, and also I have lost two mules, one laden with silver from Florence and one with silk of Syria. And indeed we should have lost all but for this knight and his squire who fought for us boldly and wisely. I commend them to your nobility. Also I desire quittance for the good merchandise."

The Governor broke out in oaths and stopped himself with an effort more alarming than the explosion. "You, sir, what have you to tell me?" he turned lowering brows on Silvain, but spoke mildly.

"That I am Silvain de St. Lo, my lord."

"God's body. I do not know your name."

"Alas, my lord, I feared it. But I think that you will. In this matter, what I did was nothing. For the rest, it was what Master Cosimo has said. This only I marked that the robbers cried, 'The Wolf, The Wolf

of the Mountain!' as if it were the name of their captain."

"That knave!" the Constable cried out.

"Oh, you know him, do you?" said the Governor.

"My lord, he is the bane of all the mountain roads."

Then Silvain said gently. "This I hoped," and he laughed. "Good my lord, give me the venture. Let me hunt this Wolf on his mountain."

"God's body, is that all you ask?" The Governor lay back in his chair and stared, and his bluff, bullying face was mellowed.

"My lord, I know that it is a great thing," Silvain said gently. "God Himself has no more to give than a venture of honour."

The Governor kicked the shins of the Constable of Le Monêtier. "Look at him well. Here is a man who asks not money, but fighting."

"My lord, I envy him. I wish I had his youth."

"You were a cub of another litter, old fox. Tell me, what the devil do you do for your living? When did you hunt this Wolf who prowls on your roads?"

"My lord, I have hunted the knave all the year and thought I had driven him out of my land. But there are many lairs in the mountains."

"I warrant there are. And why should our Constable bring him to bay? He is devilish useful. While he prowls, travellers need a guard and for a guard they have to pay the good Constable. The devil take you, he must be worth a king's revenue to Le Monêtier. Kill him? Not you! You know better."

"By my faith, my lord, you do me wrong. I take you to witness, no traveller has made complaint of my road in your day till Master Cosimo came."

The Governor's bloodshot eyes twinkled. "Aye, that was an ill coming. The others they paid and were safe, or the Wolf ate them. Hark you, friend, do you know this Wolf?"

"How should I know him?" the Constable flushed. "I would to God I had ever come up with him. One of us would have died that day."

"Oh, you bark loud. I keep no dogs that do not bite. God's blood, you were made Constable of Le Monêtier to keep the King's road safe, not to fill your purse."

The Constable flushed and grew pale. "This is hard measure, my lord. I have held Le Monêtier and done the King's work many a year and there was never a word against me till now. Trust me, I will not rest till I have brought you this Wolf's head."

"You have had your turn. It is another man's now." He chuckled. "But be comforted. There is no rest for you. Take horse and bring this knight to Le Monêtier and set him on the trail of your Wolf and give him all he asks." He turned to Silvain. "You have your venture, lad. Bring me this Wolf's head"—he chuckled—"and bring it alive if you can." He held out his big red hand. "Take horses of mine and begone. Good fortune. 'Ware Wolf and 'ware fox! God's body, I would it were you who sat here and I who rode."

"Yet you should be happy, my lord," said Silvain gently. "For you make men proud to serve you."

So through the gloaming Silvain and Thibaut rode back up the valley and Messire Thibaut mourned that he was a bird jumping off its perch and back again and none comforted him. For the Constable held Silvain in talk. He had no bitterness. He praised Silvain, he praised the Governor, and occasionally he praised himself. The only evil he knew of was the Wolf of the Mountain, and he made the fellow a devil with horns and claws and tail. Hunt him? As well hunt a storm. Twice when the Constable had drawn the net close about him he broke out and only dead men could tell how. The peasants swore they had seen him riding an avalanche, flying from one mountain peak to another

on clouds. They believed that he had his lair in the crevasses of the glacier. Good reason they had to fear him. Men had been found wandering with their eyes put out, women had crawled back to their homes mutilated for the Wolf's pleasure.

Silvain crossed himself. "I thank God for this good venture," he said.

The Constable for the first time kept silence a moment. Then he gave Silvain more praise: a gallant knight, a man for noble deeds. "Oh, sir, here is enough of me," Silvain broke in. "Who I am I know. But who is this Wolf?"

The Constable laughed. "That no man knows. Some broken soldier out of Italy, they say, or a German lanzknecht. By my faith, I cannot guess. When you bring in his head, we may find a name for him."

"The dead will not speak. It is my task to bring him alive."

And again the Constable was silent. "By the mass, you are hopeful," he said at last and said no more.

When they came to the castle there was some delay to let them in, and the men who came with lanterns to take their horses revealed many curious faces in the background. Silvain looked about him and lingered, but the Constable hurried them on into the dim lit hall and there left them with courteous excuses, that he had taken his servants by surprise and feared all things were unready and must give orders.

"This lord is like a cat," said Thibaut gloomily. "He purrs and purrs. But who knows what is in his brindled head?"

From the gloom some one said "Meow!" Into the light of the candles on the high table came a little woman. She swept a curtsy. "Good even to you, good mice," said she.

While she was down in her curtsy she was nothing but a round rosy face rising from a spread of blue mantle. She lacked a body. Even when she stood up

again there was not much of it. But her face had life enough and vigour.

"I am the ghost of Le Monêtier," she said and her dark eyes were mischievous. She laughed but there was something not mirthful in the thrust of her little chin.

"What is on your soul, my fair ghost, that you cannot rest?" Silvain smiled.

"I look for a man and I cannot find him."

"He has ill fortune that he does not hear you."

She put her head on one side. "Does he not then?" she said demurely.

"Tell me, pretty ghost, what do you need a man for?"

"Alas, that you have not seen it! I am a woman, sir."

"It is indeed the noblest thing that one can be in this world," said Silvain gently.

"But would you be such a thing if you could?"

"I know that I am not worthy," Silvain bowed.

"Good faith, I am not so sure," she cried and tossed her head. And then the Constable bustled in.

"Your pardon. You have waited too long, but you shall fare the better." He saw the blue mantle behind Silvain. "Renée, I thought you were abed, child: you did not come to meet me. So much the better! Now I have a hostess for you, sir. It is Renée de Chambran, my ward."

"He took me for a ghost," she laughed as Silvain kissed her hands. "Well, sir, am I flesh and blood?"

"For an imp," the Constable said. "Never heed her. She is as full of mischief as these bottles of good wine": he nodded at the table where his servants were busy.

"Sir, you live merrily in Le Monêtier," said Silvain.

"Now the man knows me, but I know not him." Renée sat herself down by a dish of sweetmeats. "It is the fate of woman."

"Do him honour, child. He is Sir Silvain de St. Lo, a noble knight."

"Then what is he doing here?" said Renée with her mouth full.

The Constable made believe to box her ears. "He is a knight-errant and rides on lonely ventures of honour."

Renée stayed her hand on the sugared strawberries. "There is no lack in this land. God send him courage," she said gravely and looked full at Silvain.

"Come, sir, we are served," the Constable cried. "To table."

There was no fault in the fare of that supper save that the Constable talked more about it than a good host should. Indeed he talked of nothing else till the servants were gone and he had sent the little woman to bed. Then he drew his chair closer to Silvain and bidding Thibaut take another bottle to his corner became portentous.

There was news of the Wolf. Some of the Constable's men out on patrol in the higher pastures to guard the peasants' cattle had fought with the Wolf's band and marked them to ground above the glaciers of the Mountain of the Lambs. The rogues were in a hurry and some of them laden. The Constable had no doubt but that the whole band were gathered there. It was their custom to go into hiding far from the place where they had made a big foray. He drew a map on the table with chicken bones for mountains and salt for glaciers and streaks of wine for valleys.

"A strong place to hold, sir," he shook his grizzled head, "and a strong band are they. I pray you, let me give you men to ride with you. Or I myself will serve you. You command me and all of mine."

"Sir, you are generous. But this is a lone venture for me, or I have no honour in it."

"God forbid that I should hold you back," said the Constable. "But I fear for you in my heart. At

least let me give you men to guide you in the mountains?"

Silvain smiled. "Why, sir, they would trust me no more than you do. I must be my own guide and fight my own fight."

"God be with you in all," said the Constable, and Silvain asked for his bed.

The room in the tower which they were given had no lock nor bolt on the door. Messire Thibaut, assuring himself of this, said that it was a hard world for poor men and laid himself down across the doorway on the stones. But Silvain put off his breastplate and knelt in the moonlight and said his prayers.

He was on his knees still, though Thibaut had been snoring some while, when the door moved. Thibaut came to his feet from sleep in one snaky movement and stood aside, his dagger in his hand.

The door opened. One creature came in, so small that Thibaut grasping at it gripped only clothes. "Holy Mother!" he gasped. "It is the ghost, my lord."

"It is a woman, Sir Silvain," said Renée. "Are you a man?"

Silvain rose from his knees. "By God's will, lady."

"Then you are made to serve me."

"I am the servant of all women."

She laughed. "A dread fellow. Here is but one woman this night. What will you do for me?"

"I kiss your hand and ask your will."

"He asks! Come, sir, here is a venture for you." She held by his hands and drew close. "I have need of a knight, Silvain."

"And I ride to win honour. Where is it, lady?"

"I am a prisoner here. This man the Constable holds me in ward by no right nor will of mine. He served my father, and when my father died he took all and holds me too lest I should marry and claim my in-

heritance. I am kept here in the castle, I may not go beyond the walls, and there is none to help me."

"By my faith, this shall not endure," Silvain said. "I will do you right, Lady Renée."

"There is a man here," she said and kissed him. "Set me free, Silvain."

"My life upon it. Fear no more."

She held to him. "Good faith, I fear nothing. Carry me off, Silvain. I lie in your hand."

"Trust me yet. I will do my errand and come again."

"Wait! You bid me wait?" She thrust him away. "Oh, this is knightly! He called you a knight-errant, did not he? Yes, you are such a knight as he would praise."

"Lady, I never failed man nor woman yet. And you I will not fail. But I am bound in honour to this venture till it is done."

"Fie, what is it then, your brave venture?"

"I go to take the Wolf of the Mountain."

"You——" she broke out, laughing. "Oh, the poor man!" She made a noise like a bleating sheep and ran away.

CHAPTER XII

WOLF'S LAIR

IN the morning the Constable was as eager that they should be gone as Silvain. He had food and wine ready for their saddle bags. Their horses were at the door when they went in to breakfast. He wished them God-speed before they had done eating: his big face was all a smile as he watched them mount and ride away.

The gate of his castle clanged behind them. "There is one who is happy to see us go," said Thibaut. "I would give a ha'penny to know what is behind that toothy smile."

"Or behind that shut gate," said Silvain with his head half turned, for he seemed to hear movement of horses and men. "Ride slowly, brother. There are others who see us go. They watch from the walls. Do not look back. Slowly and make for cover there."

The castle of Le Monêtier stood on a knoll of rock in the midst of the wide valley. The road was down by the river. Away towards the mountains, the valley narrowed quickly where a wooded gorge came into it. On that wood Silvain set his eyes.

But a cry came from the castle: "Silvain! For the love of your mother, Silvain!" A blue sleeve came from a window, a golden scarf streamed on the wind.

"Hear nothing, see nothing, my lord," Thibaut cried. "It is a trick and a trap."

"But it is a woman," said Silvain, and he sprang from his horse and climbed the rock to the foot of the castle wall.

The blue mantle leaned out of the window above him, the little face looked down and he saw it pale with wide, wild eyes. "Silvain, save me! He knows that I came to you. He has shut me up here. He threatens me, my God. I do not know what he has for me. He swears I shall trouble no man more."

"Then he lies indeed," Silvain smiled. "I am here, lady."

"Holy Mother, what can you do?"

Silvain measured the window and the fall from the window with his eyes. "I can do nothing unless you trust me," he said. "Come."

"You have said it at last," she cried and knelt in the window and cast herself down, a shred of blue in the air. He caught her, tossed her up on his shoulder and ran down to the road.

On the castle wall men were shouting.

"This is what he had not thought of," the little woman laughed.

"I wonder," Silvain said. They came to the horses and he swung her up beside Messire Thibaut. She made a face, but slipped her arm round that lank body and cried, "Forward, good fellow, forward."

"Make for the wood, brother," Silvain said. "Ride, ride."

"No safety there, lord. Carry her to Briançon."

"We can never win through. Ride on and ride hard."

Already the castle gate was opening. Thibaut saw it and groaned and set his horse going. Down the valley indeed was no safety. The Constable's men were riding out of the castle and must catch them if they turned. Thibaut drove his horse on and came out of the valley into the wooded gorge and Silvain followed him, going easily.

The track up the gorge was broken and scarred but wide enough, made for the hauling of timber. It rose high above the torrent, then wound down to cross by

a wooden bridge where the water roared between sheer cliffs. Thibaut, who had no head for such work, took his horse over cautiously and could make little speed on the steep climb beyond. Silvain came after headlong and as he thundered across the bridge found the planks loosen. He hardly saved a fall. He flung himself from the saddle and tied his frightened horse to a tree and ran back to the bridge. One plank was out of place. He tore it up and used it for a lever to prise up the others, and as they yielded thrust them down into the torrent. The first of the Constable's men charging on as fast as he could down that winding track came suddenly upon a gulf spanned only by plank here and another there. They could not hold their horses: they crashed down on the rocks and the wild water before they knew it, and others went after them, while through the din Silvain laboured methodically to break the last planks away. He made an end of that bridge and rode away gentling his horse, leaving ghastly havoc in the depths of the ravine. "Alas, poor souls, that is an ill lord to serve," said he, and said a prayer for the dead.

The track climbed up through the wood. He made what pace he could and in a while saw the Lady Renée in Thibaut's saddle alone, for Messire Thibaut trudged beside, his head over his shoulder, a gloomy man. "If two people ride a horse, one must ride behind," Thibaut croaked. "That is what she will not learn, lord."

"He rides like a sack and a sack of bones," said she. "Take me with you, Silvain."

"He is the lighter man."

"Fie, your horse carries you in your armour. I will be sworn I do not weigh so much. You know it. I have ridden you. Take me up and I will be armour for you." For Silvain wore only helmet and breastplate on this venture.

"Good faith, you would stop steel well, little one," Silvain laughed. "And I should have high honour in that. Mount and ride, brother. We are too slow."

"What, are they close upon us yet?" Renée cried. "I thought you had set them on a false scent."

"There is only the torrent between us," Silvain said, and told her what he had done.

"Oh, noble!" she cried. "You do not know fear. One against all that company! That was well fought, Silvain."

"Pity them, lady," said Silvain sadly. "They ride for a bad captain. I have no honour in it."

"I am weary of your honour," she snapped at him.

"As the fox said to the watch dog," quoth Thibaut, and set her behind the saddle and mounted again and looked at his master. "Where now, lord? For I think this way goes nowhere."

"There is a top to everything," Silvain said, and waved him on.

It had become hard to tell which was track and which was hillside. Plainly the thing was cut only to bring down timber, and where the good trees yielded to stone-pines and stones it ceased to be. Thibaut kept his horse breasting the slope, but he pushed his iron cap askew and scratched his head, disgusting thereby the little woman behind him. "There is a top to everything," he repeated, "as the rat said when he ran up the chimney. And what will I do when I get there?"

The top was not far off, but they found it a narrow ridge from which they looked down into a gorge the very twin of that from which they had come, steep and narrow and wooded. "Now are we up, but where are we?" Thibaut groaned, and Silvain took his bearings and frowned. To go up and down across such ravines as these must wear them out yet bring them but a little way from Le Monêtier. Yet if they kept high they might come upon crags where no horse could move.

To his perplexities the little woman spoke softly. "So these two poor babes were lost in the wood. And they laid themselves down and slept and the robins came and covered them with leaves, and they woke no

more, pretty souls. And that is the end of the story, my Silvain. Come, my dear, do not be proud. Ask me to help you."

"Of your grace, Lady Renée," he smiled.

"Fie, you think women are for nothing but worship. I am the best man of us three. Look now, I will find your way for you. I know this land as I know my bed. Where will you go?"

"I must bring you safe to the Governor at Briançon. But I dare not take you down the valley here or we shall come into the Constable's hand again."

"To Briançon?" she laughed. "Oh, I am content. We must keep high then by the Alp Benoit and the Pass of the Black Rock and round by the Pass of Buffère and so down to the valley again below the Constable's marches. And when you have brought me to Briançon, why then you may go hunt your Wolf."

Silvain looked at her with respect. "You are sure of yourself," he said. "Lead on."

"Oh, your Wolf shall not have long to wait. Trust me."

She led them along the ridge towards the mountains. It was rough going, and even when they came out of the pines to open ground there were so many boulders, so many holes hidden among the little Alpine rhododendrons that they had hard work with their horses. But the slope was gentle, she knew how to avoid the ravines, she set them, it was plain, as easy a course as a man could find in that country. What she said they would find, scree or rock, pasture or scrub, broken ground or level, that they did find, and though she went on many detours she never forgot her direction and still worked round on the circuit back to the valley.

"You have an eye for country, Lady Renée."

"I have roamed every mile of this with my father," she said quickly. "Good days! Oh, Silvain, judge how I have pined shut in the castle!"

"That is over, by the grace of God."

"And the kind Silvain. How I thank you, my dear! Good faith, if I have my will I shall live upon the mountains."

Then Messire Thibaut groaned.

"Life is good here," Silvain smiled at her.

Thibaut looked at him with a face of fear.

She laughed. "Shall we be king and queen of the mountains, Silvain?"

They had climbed high, they were working round the shoulder of the Alp Benoit, seven thousand feet up, and looked down upon a slope too steep to ride. "There is the Pass of the Black Rock." She pointed to a great combe on the right. They made for water and ate and lay down to sleep in the twilight.

Cold waked them before dawn. It was a silent company that mounted as the sun rose over the white crags of Italy. But the little woman's head was clear enough though her cheeks were blue as her mantle, and she led them on till she made out a stream to the south and cried out, "See! We are coming to the Pass of Buffère."

It was a narrow gateway between two masses of rock. The way down to it lay over a steep rock-strewn slope. They went afoot and she flitted on ahead of the men with their stumbling horses till she was so far away that Silvain shouted at her. She waved her hand to him and laughed and went on. Then he gave both horses to the wretched Thibaut and ran after her. "You are too bold, lady. Who knows what is beyond that gate?"

"Oh, wise Silvain! A careful man are you. Be comforted. You shall go first and I will wait till you have searched the pass." She laughed and sat herself down on the mountainside.

So he went on alone. When he was in the pass two men leapt out of the rocks upon him and cried, "Stand! Who are you that come by the Pass of Buffère?"

He drew back, hand on his sword, and looked them over. They were not like the Constable's men, they

were lean fellows burnt brown as the rock, clad in rough leather, mountain folk to the eye, shepherds or herdsmen. But they carried swords. He heard a whistle from the rocks above. He saw more men coming up.

"Tell me who you are that hold the pass against me," he said. "There are more of you than of me."

"That is well thought of," one of them laughed. "We serve the Wolf, friend."

"This is a good day, brother," Silvain laughed too. "Bring me to your Wolf, for it is he I seek."

But while he spoke men came plunging down the rocks above them, and one who led them shouted and at the sound others rose running into sight from below. This leader leaped down where Silvain stood in the pass and cried out, "Do him no hurt, he is welcome."

"This is courtesy, my lord Wolf," Silvain bowed and dropped his vizor and drew his sword.

"God's body, what would you have?" the leader checked and stared at him. "You have sought me and here I am." He was a young man and lean and lithe. He wore a coat of chain mail and there was a sword at his side, but he had no helmet. He cocked his cap over one insolent eye, he was as pleased with himself as a bantam.

"I have an errand to you, Sir Wolf."

"A good errand, by my faith, and I thank you well."

"Spoken like a knight. Walk apart with me, I pray you."

"Time enough, friend. There is a lady waits for me."

"But it is not so. Now is my time and yours, my lord Wolf. Come, will you yield yourself or try your fortune against me?"

"Yield? What madman are you?" he laughed and looked round at his men, for he had half a score behind him. "Hold him fast, lads, till I bring the lady in."

But Silvain stood in the narrow mouth of the pass.

"She is not for you," he said, and shouted. "Thibaut, brother Thibaut, my horse for her. Mount, lady, mount and ride."

Then the men ran upon him roaring, " 'Ware Wolf, 'ware Wolf." He held his ground, though many swords beat at him and some came home on head and breast. His mail was proof, but the weight of the blows was heavy upon him. Still, though he reeled he kept the gate, for the unarmoured men were wary of his sweeping sword and would leap in and out again rather than come upon him together and risk themselves to hew him down. But the fight went hard and he had no hope but to hold them till the little woman could ride off into safety. "A careful lord you have," he panted. "Where is he, this Wolf, who will not fight his own fight? He lurks, he flinches. Try it man to man, Sir Wolf. I am here for you and none other. But you shun the challenge."

"God's body, stand aside, lads," the leader rushed in.

He had no chance to prove himself. Renée came into the fight. Breathless and laughing she arrived and flung her arms about Silvain and cried out, "Gaston, Gaston, do not strike."

The poor man was checked with his sword in the air, a queer thing to see.

But Silvain was not amused. Silvain whirled round with her and plucked her arms loose. "God's death, you ruin us all, child," he muttered. "Away with you. Ride for your honour, ride. It is the Wolf himself."

"My God, do I not know him!" she cried and quit Silvain to fling herself upon the Wolf's breast.

He took her heartily and holding her to him, "Well, sir," he laughed, "we can do no more now, neither you nor I. But I pray you let us come to it again."

"Oh, silly!" said Renée. "Never, do you hear me, never! He is an angel."

"I believe it, darling. Sir, go to heaven."

"Pray, sir, help me there. I am Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of Normandy, who have come far to seek you and it is in my mind that you flinched from my challenge."

"I am Gaston de Fontenil and no knight, but I will meet you afoot or on horse, armed or naked."

The little woman crowed like a cock. "You are two silly fellows," said she. "But, by my faith, you shall not fight." The two men looked at each other over her head and smiled.

"Sir, you command here. At your leisure," said Silvain.

"I thank you for this courtesy," said Gaston. "Come, Renée."

"I will not come, Gaston! That man there took me out of the hands of the Constable and beat off a horde of the Constable's men, and he has had me at his will a day and a night in the mountains and brought me to you in safety and honour. Say then, are you bound to him?"

"I am bound," Gaston said. "Sir, do me right. I cannot fight against you. I am your man."

"Not so, by my faith," Silvain cried. "You owe me nothing, friend. For what I did was not to serve you. I ride to kill you."

"And you bring me my true love," Gaston said.

"Not by my will," said Silvain so sadly that the little woman broke out laughing.

"Not by your will! My dear, you have done nothing by your will this long while. Or where should I be this day? You know not what you do, Silvain."

"Good faith, who does? I think none of us knew how this would fall."

"A true word!" Gaston laughed.

"Oh, silly! Did I not?" Renée pinched him.

"Faith, you are as wise as you are high," says he. "Well, sir, come to dinner."

"How shall I eat your bread?" said Silvain sadly.

"Why, you have given me a wife. Name of God, I may give you a dinner. Simple enough both, alas, but by my faith I think they be wholesome."

"Sir, did you say simple?" Silvain asked, contemplating Renée.

Into the mouth of the pass came the mournful countenance of Thibaut. "Is it peace, lord?" he said in a hollow voice.

"Indeed, brother, I have no hope of it," said Silvain. "See," and he pointed to Renée on her Gaston's arm.

Thibaut shook his head. "God have mercy upon them," he said and cheered up marvellously. "Let us give thanks for our deliverance, lord."

"They are merry, are not they?" said Renée. "But I think the laugh is ours. Come, where is your dinner, Gaston?" And over that dinner of salt beef and rye bread in the cave below the pass she told him her adventures. "So the brave knight who came to kill the Wolf carried me straight into the Wolf's mouth. Oh, the wise Silvain! He thought he was taking me to his Governor at Briançon and I was a good girl and guided him meekly. Do I not know the mountains, Silvain? Gaston has had his lair by the Pass of Buffère many a day."

"I am afraid of this wife of mine, Silvain," Gaston said, and put his arm round her and laughed loud.

"I wonder," Silvain said.

Gaston checked his laughter. "What do you wonder? This is all true, by my faith."

"I wonder many things, my friend. I wonder why the Constable told me you lurked on the other side of the valley."

"The Constable is a cunning, treacherous knave."

"But I wonder why he would not have you hunted. I wonder who you are."

"By my faith, you have a right to that," Gaston cried, and told his story. He was the son of a poor knight who held land at Fontenil, in the valley, of

Renée's father, the old Constable of Le Monêtier. When he grew up he went out to seek fortune, fighting in Italy. He was serving the Duke of Milan and word came to him that his father was dead, and he made for home and Renée. But before he was back in the valley, her father died also, and the new Constable held the tower at Fontenil and the land and drove him away. Then he took to the mountains and gathered men about him and harried the Constable's farms. "This is his beef that you eat and his wine you drink. And so they call me the Wolf of the Mountain."

"Is it only his goods you live upon, Sir Wolf?" Silvain said.

Gaston flushed. "I am no thief, sir. I take what is mine. There is no man in the land but the Constable and his knaves who suffers by me."

"And yet he would have sent me astray when I came to take you," Silvain said. "And here you lie and the Lady Renée knows your lair. Does he not know it that he does not hunt you out?"

"Holy cross, can I tell you what the knave knows?" Gaston cried. "He is dark and deep as hell."

Silvain lay back against the rocks and smiled to himself and looked out of the cave through the sunlight to the far horizon, which was a way of his. But it did not please Gaston, who asked him angrily if he was wondering still. "Many things, yet, brother," Silvain said, "for I am a simple man." So that dinner began to go awkwardly and the little woman was forcing laughter about nothing and Gaston muttering to her and fidgeting when a man ran in crying alarm.

"Sir, sir, there are men marching against us, a great company."

Gaston sprang up and made for the look-out place on the crags above the pass. "And this is one of the things I wondered," Silvain said softly and followed him.

CHAPTER XIII

WOLF'S SKIN

A COLUMN was moving along the shoulder of the mountain, some few on horseback, the others afoot, archers and spearmen. But Gaston laughed. "Let them come. We can hold this against them till they are spent," and he shouted his men to arms.

Silvain touched his shoulder. "You have a back as well as a front," he said.

Gaston turned. On that other side of the pass the ground was easier, a great bowl of pasture land out of which a track like a spout led down to the valley. Across the open pasture a line of horsemen was stretched far and working on towards the pass in a long chain. Gaston swore. "The cursed rogue! Here is a devilish trap. Saddle and ride, lads."

"These be the Constable's men?"

"Devil doubt them. See, there he rides in their midst."

"So at last he has come to seek you," Silvain smiled.

Gaston swore. "Aye, now that I have Renée. That rouses him. A cruel devil is he. Body of God, I will hold her against him still. Look to yourself, sir. This is no quarrel of yours."

Silvain laughed. "Sir, it is in my mind that I have made it," he said gently. "I abide to the end. Tell me, where will you ride?"

"Charge through them to the valley. There is no other help."

"Yet that is what they will look for. Ride first on that track which climbs to the sheepfold."

"Why, that will take us up among the crags and——"

"It will take us nowhere indeed. But they must gather to meet us. Then we turn aside and slip them and break for the valley."

Gaston stared at him. "You have fought many a fight."

"But this is the happiest," Silvain laughed.

"There are some of us will go down."

"They will die well."

"Sir, if I fall, do not fail my lady."

"My honour is her honour," Silvain said.

They leapt down from the rocks where Renée stood gazing up at them, still and white, and holding each a hand of hers they hurried her to the horses.

Then riding in close order their little company made for the high ground. The long line of the Constable's horsemen seeing them choose that unexpected way fell into some confusion in haste to meet them and the Constable was loud and angry. But he gathered a strong mass against them and the rest of the line worked round to take them in flank.

"Hold on yet," Silvain said, measuring ground and pace. The Constable's mass was going the faster, the clash was near. "Now by the right, now! Keep close and ride hard."

They turned sharp and rode at the thin line on their flanks. It closed to take the shock, but the ranks it made were weak.

Silvain and his company crashed upon it and broke through, not without wounds on their unharmed bodies. Then Silvain drew aside from the front and let all go by. "Ride hard," he cried, "you lead them now. Ride hard."

The Constable's mass was out of hand. Under his raging orders it checked and was scattered as some halted and some tried to turn. But he sent it on in a wild pursuit. Soon the bolder men or the better

mounted were drawing near. Silvain riding easily turned on a sudden against the first of them, struck down one man and another unawares and turned again and galloped after Gaston and his company. To Gaston's side he thrust his horse. "Here is a hard chase, sir. He will follow us far. Carry your lady to Briançon and say to the Governor that Silvain de St. Lo sent you and tell your tale."

"But you, Silvain?" the little woman cried.

Silvain laughed. "Be happy, lady, for happy am I this day," and he reined up his horse and let them go by and rode easily, a rearguard of one, and as he rode he sang a Latin hymn.

All across the pasture the Constable's men were spread in pursuit, and some riding hard made across to cut off the fugitives where the high ground closed in again and left only a narrow space for the road to the valley. Silvain chose his own line and sat down in the saddle and sent his horse on. He crashed upon those venturous riders and bore one down and thundered on in a running fight with three more till only one was left and he had no more heart for it and drew off. So Gaston and his company came safe out of the pastures to the road.

But before Silvain could reach it, others of the Constable's men were in front of him and he was left alone between those enemies and the main body which the Constable brought on behind with a torrent of oaths.

Gaston looked back and saw his plight and checked and turned, but he rose in his stirrups shouting, "Ride on, ride on. I hold them at my will."

From behind the Constable was roaring to the men in front that they must come back and cut him down. "Fools, fools, make sure of him, or you lose all." The Constable's voice cracked in his passion. "Down with him. If he breaks through we are dead men."

Silvain laughed. "Too late, too late," he called. "Dead are you already and know it not." But he rode

warily, keeping his distance from the men behind, closing on the men in front no more than he must.

Their minds were divided, they checked and faltered, and chose at last to obey their master and turned on Silvain. Then Messire Thibaut, who had been riding with his head over his shoulder as his way was, pulled his horse aside and fitted a bolt to his cross-bow. He shot and shot again.

Before they reached Silvain two men went down. That gave him room. He charged at the others, swerved from the shock and as they went by swept a backward blow at a man's loins and galloped on to Thibaut who sat his horse shooting as fast as he could work his bow.

"Good thanks, brother. Spare your bolts. We shall need all yet. Ride, ride."

They galloped on together. There was need. The Constable had put something of his own fear into his men and they drove their horses hard. The chase roared on in the twilight. Once and again Silvain turned to charge men who pressed too near, once and again Thibaut halted and shot. So they made mile after mile and drew near the main road above Briançon and Gaston was safe away. But Silvain's horse had wounds in neck and chest and both were failing and behind them the Constable raged nearer.

"Pray God for dark," Thibaut groaned. They were riding through tilled land which had no cover for them, and beyond the valley lay wide in the evening mist.

A light broke out against the sky, the beacon which glowed every night above the gate of Briançon. "Look well, Constable, look well," Silvain shouted. "There is Briançon."

"The devil burn you, you shall never be there," the Constable roared.

"But he is there," Silvain laughed. "Gaston is there and tells his tale. A Wolf! A Wolf!" He reined his

failing horse close to Thibaut and muttered, "On, brother, on. Turn by the trees there and shoot. This is the last throw."

The Constable was almost upon him. He flung himself from his spent horse, sword in hand. "Rot you in hell, I have you now," the Constable roared and made at him to ride him down. He sprang to the Constable's left and so compelling an awkward back-hand blow at him he slipped under it and thrust upward beneath the breastplate. The Constable was dragged from the saddle screaming and he rolled and writhed in the dust under the horses of his men.

"Your lord is down and dead," Silvain shouted. "Broken men are you this night." And Thibaut's arrows began to beat upon them. "Who dies for him now? Of your grace give him company where he is gone. Wait yet a little and the Governor will come from Briançon and hang you all."

And he darted hither and thither among them, striking wherever he could drive home his sword. That wild attack brought confusion. They struck at him and struck each other, and with the arrows scourging them and his sword searing in the dusk could not tell what smote them. "Your lord is dead," Silvain roared. "Who dies for him?" Their hearts went out of them. They broke and fled.

Messire Thibaut coming back gingerly found horses without riders and a mess of men's bodies on the road. "God have mercy upon you, are you dead?" Thibaut groaned.

"Not if you have water, brother," Silvain panted. He had flung himself down, he lay arms wide like a man crucified, all his body heaving. . . .

In the hall of the castle at Briançon Gaston and his company stood before the Governor. "You asked for me and here am I," the governor said, and his red brow puckered as he looked from the man to the little woman. "Who are you that come to Briançon crying alarms?"

"I am Gaston de Fontenil. Men call me the Wolf of the Mountains. And——"

"Do they so? You are a bold man, Gaston."

"And Sir Silvain de St. Lo bade me ride to you and ask justice. But——"

The Governor laughed loud. "Well said, Silvain! My Wolf, you shall have justice to your heart's desire. Go, some of you, bring Master Cosimo."

"Sir, for the love of God, waste no more time. Send out a company on the road to Le Monêtier. I asked them at the gate, I asked them here at the castle, but they would bring me first to you. And all this while your good knight Sir Silvain rides in peril."

"Then a happy man is he. Care not for him, my Wolf. You have your own cares. Ha, Master Cosimo! Your Wolf is caught. Look, here he is and his pack."

The old merchant came slowly and looked into each man's face. "Here be none that I know, my lord," he said at last. "Their blood must not be shed for me. Find me the band which set on me and I will swear to many a man."

"They are strown along the valley, Master Cosimo," a hoarse voice cried. Dirt and blood from head to heel Silvain came up the hall. "My lord, I have done my deed. I have sent you the Wolf alive. I pray you, do him right."

"Why, man, what Wolf is this? No wild beast he. You did not get all that blood in taking him."

"Why, no, my lord. He is not the only Wolf in your mountains. Come and see." He strode out into the courtyard. There men with lanterns stood curious about a horse on which a man's body was bound. "I have brought the Wolf dead, my lord. I have done my deed," Silvain said.

The Governor looked long. "It is the Constable, by my faith," he said and he chuckled.

"So it is," Thibaut croaked, "so it was and so it will

be. Many a sheepdog lives upon mutton and gives the wolves the blame of the bones."

"Oh, wise man!" the Governor poked at him. "And when did you learn that, my Silvain?" he laughed. "Come in, man, and tell your tale."

"It is ill talk between one who is full and one who is fasting," Thibaut groaned, "as the calf said to the cow when she lowed at milk time."

"This tale is not mine," Silvain said. "Let the Wolf tell it, my lord."

The Governor thrust them back into the hall, and he cried to Gaston, "Speak, my Wolf, it is your turn."

So Gaston at last began at the beginning, how the Constable had robbed him of his inheritance and denied him his bride and how he had harried the Constable's land till the peasants called him the Wolf of the Mountain.

"But never he harried you," the Governor chuckled.

"Sir, his men ever fled from me."

"Devil doubt them."

"And none had hurt of me but him and his."

"Still he spared you. Oh, the merciful man!" The Governor put his elbow into Silvain's ribs. "What did I say, Silvain? This Wolf was worth a King's revenue to Master Constable. Who would not pay for a guard against the Wolf, the Wolf he stripped them bare."

"My lord," Gaston flushed, "if honest men have been robbed on the mountains, I swear by the Cross, it is no work of mine."

"Tell your tale, Wolf, tell your tale."

So Gaston told how Silvain had come to him and challenged him and brought him Renée, how the Constable had come upon them with all his men, and how Silvain had fought that long running fight.

The Governor nudged Silvain, chuckling. "It is your turn. Tell on."

"All is told, my lord."

"God's body, I will have the story of that fight out

of you if I sit till dawn. But tell me now, when did your wisdom guess our Constable was the Wolf to kill?"

"Sir, it came into my mind while he talked to me, for I could not love him. But I would not believe it lest I did him wrong. Yet it came back to me and I wondered. And at the last when I saw among his men men who had attacked Master Cosimo then I knew. God have mercy upon him."

The Governor laughed loud. "God save you, Silvain, you have a simple soul."

"Alas, my lord, I do not love to think men knaves. But tell me in your turn, when you sent me forth with the Constable to catch your Wolf, what did you know?"

Bloodshot eyes twinkled. "Alas, my Silvain, I have lived some while in this world. Bear me no malice, lad. You shall not need."

"By my faith, there is only thanks in my heart. For this was a rare rich venture."

"You shall say so, by God's faith. Let him that killed the Wolf wear the skin. I will have you for Constable in Le Monêtier."

The little woman clapped her hands and cried, "Silvain!"

Silvain rose and knelt before the Governor. "I pray you, my lord, let it be his. For it was her father's, and he knows your land and is true. But I must go my way, so am I made."

"God have mercy, what do you seek?"

"My lord, I ride to win honour and fortune."

The Governor stared at him. "A greedy man are you, O Silvain my son," he said. "And proud—proud as the good God."

But Messire Thibaut was heard to groan. "Merry we live and merry we die," he croaked. "And, alackaday, there is no wine to cheer us."

Whereat the Governor started up and roared for supper.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE OF SALUZZO

FOR a week and a day Silvain and Thibaut made merry in Briançon and married the lady and led her home, and thereafter they took the road again. You see them coming down from the Alps into Italy. The snows shone far behind, but they were still among the rocks. Their path wound by masses of grey limestone which towered in broken cliff to peaks like spears. But below and near the Italian plain smiled at them through sunshine. Out of the dark green of vineyards and orchards a city rose glittering white. "See, brother, we come to a good land," Silvain said.

But Thibaut glowered. "I have seen it this long while. I do not believe in it," he said. "Who goes with you comes nowhere. We ride to dreamland, my lord." His horse, which he was leading, slipped and slid round a turn of the steep track and crushed him against the cliff and the rest of his breath came out in a groan. He dragged himself out and felt for his bones. "Pity me, that is the worst death ever I died," he gasped and looked about him. "I knew it," he said with sombre satisfaction. "This is hell. Here is the devil. Look how he mocks us." High above a sardonic face, bearded and horned, looked out from the cliff. A stambecco, a mountain goat, sprang from ledge to ledge and was gone.

"A blithe beast is your devil," Silvain laughed.

"No honest beast he," Thibaut shuddered and crossed himself. "He flies without wings. Holy mother, this is no land for simple flesh and blood." He

dragged his horse on in a hurry, but was not far gone before a cry came from him. "God defend us! Here is the goat turned man! Look, lord, look!"

There were people on the track below them, and one, an old man on a mule, peering up at the crags, showed to the sunlight a face something like the goat's, long, grey, bearded and malign. The others were afoot and climbing higher than he among the rocks. "Why, brother, they are a hunting party. See their bows," Silvain said.

"See fiends hunt fiends in hell. What sport!" Thibaut groaned.

While he spoke one of the party was fitting a bolt to his cross-bow. He shot high across a ravine. Silvain and Thibaut hurried on and saw a goat fallen on a ledge of rock. Its kid nuzzled into it and bleated. From the hunters came a hallo of triumph. The man who had shot took another bolt and was aiming at the kid, but a woman cried out and caught his hand. There was some argument among them. "Old goatface is merry," Thibaut said. "Look how he grins."

Round the cliff side below the dead goat came the sharp muzzle of a wolf. The beast sniffed and growled and gave tongue and sprang up the rocks to the carcass, leading a roaring pack. The kid fled, but could only reach a shelf of rock above its dead mother and there stood helpless, bleating feebly. The wolves flung themselves upon the carcass and tore it asunder and dragged it away. Some angry shouts, some arrows went after them from the hunting party, but they were soon lost among the rocks. The little kid was left waiting till its mother was eaten and the noise of the meal mingled with its bleating.

The old man laughed. "Shoot the babe now, Felix, and have done," he said.

But Silvain cried out, "Hold your bolts. That babe is mine." He flung himself from his horse and climbed down into the ravine.

The hunting party turned and stared. "Who is this father of goats?" the old man said. The woman cried out to Silvain to stop, for he was going to his death. The man who had shot bade his servants go and stay the fellow from meddling with my lord's sport. "Let be, let be," the old man said. "This is better sport than yours, Felix." And he called to Thibaut: "Hither, my master. What paladin is this you bring us?"

"Sir Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of France."

"And who made him the patron saint of the goats?"

"My lord is the patron saint of all the weak."

"Then has he a busy life and merry," the old man sniggered. "But short, I fear."

"I do not fear," Thibaut thrust out his chest. "I know my lord."

"If you know what he will do next you are a sage," the old man laughed.

Silvain was already far down the cliff-side. He had no armour upon him but his breastplate: he was quick and lithe and his reach long, but though the limestone offered him many ledges and crevices, it fell sheer or overhung often, and he had dangerous work. "Our saint is no cragsman," the old man sneered.

"My lord, send the foresters to his help," the woman cried.

The old man laughed. "Who will climb with him to feed the wolves?" he turned to his company.

They were not eager. "It is madness, so please you," one muttered. "There is nothing worth a man there."

"We have no saints here but the one, Yolande," the old man said, and turned again to look as Silvain let himself drop the last dozen feet. "Well, there he is down. Now he goes up to glory."

It was at first easier climbing on the other side, for in its lower part the rock was much broken and Silvain went up fast till he was level with their eyes. Then came sheer cliff and he was spread upon it, arms and

legs wide, and so stayed long feeling with one hand for a hold. He found it at last and worked sidelong out of sight. They heard the wolves give tongue. They saw him again wriggling up a gully in the rock and the wolves above him growling and snapping at the air.

"Shoot, Felix, shoot for the love of God," the woman cried.

"They will spring at his throat as he rises," one of the foresters said, and their bows were drawn.

But Felix said coolly, "Be wary, he is among them already. Hold your bolts."

A wolf leapt for Silvain's head, missed as he swayed aside and a grey body fell hurtling from rock to rock. Silvain swung a leg up, sprang to his feet and the pack were upon him. They could get no hold on his breastplate and his dagger let blood from one and another and his feet were busy. Two more of them went over the cliff and he shook himself free of the rest and they backed away snarling and slunk off.

Then he had to work out on the sheer rock again and so at last drew himself up to the ledge where the kid cowered. He gripped the little creature as it shrank from him and sat on the ledge and put it across his shoulders, tying its legs together in front of him with his girdle. Some while he waited there to get his breath again and choose his easiest way.

"This knight should be a shepherd," the old man sniggered. "That is his trade."

"Sir, he is like Christ the shepherd in the painting in the chapel," the woman said.

"The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep," the old man sneered. "Let him show us that too, Yolande."

But Silvain took his time and came carefully and safely down into the ravine and up again on the other side.

"Welcome, sir," the old man bowed gravely. "We need such as you in my sad land. I have not had so

merry a day this long while. Nay, nay,"—Silvain was lifting the kid from his neck—"wear the honour you have won. Only be worthy of it."

But the younger man, Felix, struck in. "My father mocks us all, sir. But, by my faith, this was a wild noble venture. You hold your life cheap."

Silvain looked at him: he was dark and sleek, very much the Italian, a pretty fellow enough. "Who holds life dear pays too dear for life," Silvain smiled.

"Sir, it is a brave man's faith," Felix smiled back.

"Every man has his own sport, Felix," the old man sneered. "You kill the mother, he saves the child." He yawned. "Come, we shall do no more to-day. He has scared all the game on the hills. Leave him to suckle his kid." He turned his mule and rode away.

"My father grows old," Felix said gently. "Do not think us churls in Saluzzo. I pray you, ride with us and let us do you honour. Such a knight as you comes not often on our hills."

"My God, that is true," the woman cried, but as Silvain looked at her she laughed. "And how will you rear your child, Sir Silvain?" She pointed to the kid.

She was a tall slight creature, dark and proud of brow. She met him with bold hard eyes. "Is there no mother's heart in Saluzzo, lady?" Silvain said tragically.

"A hit, Yolande, a hit!" Felix laughed.

"Not in the castle, I vow," she said, flushing. But she held out her hand to the kid where it stood forlorn, bleating a little, and the creature sucked at her fingers. She picked it up and set it on her mule and mounted and rode away.

That night Silvain lay in a loose gown of silk on a bed of cedar in a marble room, and a silver lamp which burnt an aromatic oil gave him light. But all the castle of Saluzzo was marble, and the luxury of the room seemed to him homely by comparison with the splen-

dours of the banquet which he had eaten and the hall where he had eaten it. The Marquis of Saluzzo kept rich state.

Thibaut came into the room with a slow and pompous gait. Messire Thibaut stood over him and smiled very sweetly and said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here," and held on by the crimson hangings of the bed.

"They are happy folk and merry, brother," Silvain said.

Thibaut hiccoughed austerely. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of heaven," he said and shook his head. "But did you eat the ortolans, my lord? And that sweet white wine?" he caressed his stomach. "A syrup of paradise. My soul is mellow to-night. Surely they live like the holy angels. The silver on the tables and the fine lady with gold on her white bosom and the pearls in her hair! But she was sad and solemn too. And the old man sitting like the cold dead in his robe of fur. God give them joy! But oh, my lord, did you eat the sweetmeat of mulberries?" He licked his lips.

"I have eaten and you have drunk. Give you good night, brother." Silvain turned on his side.

"And St. Mary grant that we wake still ourselves. For I think there is magic here," Thibaut said and crossed himself and put out a leg in a lofty step. "Peace, peace. What did I come for? Oh, the young lord asks may he speak with you, my lord?"

"Tell him I wait for him," Silvain said.

Felix came in a long red gown with a lamp in his hand. "We make poor cheer for our guests in Saluzzo," he said.

"By my faith, I have never fared so richly in all my life."

Felix laughed. "And never found so gloomy a welcome?"

"Sir, I have had all honour from you."

"Be honest with me, Silvain, for I am come to be

honest with you. I think you are a man I may trust, and God knows I have never found one yet."

"Then you live unhappy, my lord."

"There is no happiness here. You have seen my father. He is a hard man and a masterful and has trusted none all his days."

"God be merciful to him," Silvain said.

"Amen, amen. But he has no mercy in him."

"Sir, I am not your father's judge nor yours. But what you have against him is not for me to hear who am his guest."

"He has done me no wrong and if he had I should not tell of it," said Felix proudly. "Yet I am come to ask help of you, for I think the good God sent you to us."

Silvain smiled. "Or to the kid perhaps," he said gently. "But what is your need, my lord? I ride to win honour and if you have a good venture for me I will thank you for it."

"Thus it is, sir. I am not my father's heir, for my brother Humbert is the elder. Him I love better than all the world and my father loved him once. There was no one who did not love Humbert—and that has brought him down. My father found that the people made much of Humbert and he could not endure it, for he thought himself all in all at Saluzzo. And so fear came into his heart. He taught himself to believe that Humbert was seeking to win the people and cast him out and reign in his stead. So he seized my brother and carried him off a prisoner to Pinerolo, and the people are told that Humbert was taken plotting his father's death. It is not true, sir, it is not true. But there my Humbert lies in a cage this many a day."

"In a cage?" Silvain frowned.

"In an iron cage like a beast. You have such things in France, I think, for men that plot against their lords."

"King Louis brought them from Italy. But I have

not heard in my country of a father who had a cage for his son."

"God forgive him, he is hard," Felix sighed. "Judge if we are a happy house in Saluzzo."

"You plead your brother's cause well, sir. Your father should hear you."

Felix flung out his hands. "My God, do you think I come first to a stranger? He has heard me a dozen times. Yolande has been on her knees to him. All is nothing. Only my father begins to hate us too. Sir, you have heard him mock at us."

"What is that lady?" Silvain lifted his head.

"She is our cousin. She loves him well, poor child." Felix smiled sadly. "He is as dear as a brother to her."

"You are in a hard case, my lord," Silvain said gently. "But if I were my lord Humbert's brother, I should ride out to set him free."

The dark face flushed. "God knows you have the right to taunt me," he said sadly. "I come to you with my shame. Oh, sir, I would risk life and all to serve him. But I can do nothing. My father holds me under his eye. If I went out from the town alone I should be brought back in guard before I was gone a league." He shrugged his shoulders. "So it is I ask you to go on a venture that should be mine."

"I see no shame in you, my lord," Silvain said. "I am glad that I came to Saluzzo."

Felix caught his hand. "Surely God sent you. Oh, my friend, when I was a child I dreamed that I would be like you, a knight riding through the world to seek brave ventures. And here I skulk, my father's sleek slave. You go upon danger for me and mine, but, by my faith, you are the lucky man. Do you know, when I saw you venture yourself so blithe and bold upon the mountain I hated you for envy of you. And then I knew that you were the man to dare what I could not dare." He laughed sadly. "I envy you the more, Silvain. For the love of God set my brother free and deliver us all."

"By God's honour, I will do my endeavour," Silvain said gravely. And they sat long and talked of the castle in which the prisoner lay and the man who had him in guard.

Silvain would have been in the saddle early, but Saluzzo had given too much wine to Messire Thibaut, and when he was sought there was no sense in him. Silvain's impatience made the old lord peevish. "You are in a hurry to be away from us, sir. You have my sympathy. Well, Yolande, if we cannot please the master at least we have pleased the man. It is something," he shrugged.

"Oh, sir, you have here a noble palace," Silvain said gently. "But I fear its enchantment."

"Aye, it turns men into swine," the old man scowled. "Well said, boy."

"I said not that, my lord. But I ride to win honour."

"And what is the brave venture that calls you now?"

"Wish me fair fortune, my lord."

"God send you another maiden goat to deliver, brave knight," the old man sniggered.

"God send you happiness, my lord," Silvain said gravely, "and deliverance from all evil."

It was past noon before Messire Thibaut, washed into sad sobriety, climbed on his horse and rode out behind his master. When he saw that Silvain was taking the road by which they had come, "Woe is my name," he said in a hollow voice. "Do we go up into the mountains again, lord?"

"We do not," Silvain smiled.

Thibaut stared at him. Thibaut stared again at the mountains in front. "My head, my head!" he mumbled. "Am I sober or are you drunk, lord? I pray you, why do we go this way?"

"So that they should not know which way we go."

Thibaut held his brow. "And where do we go, my lord?" he said in a small meek voice.

"We go to Pinerolo. We ride on a noble venture, brother."

Thibaut groaned. "Who is Pinerolo? Man or maid?"

"It is a castle in the plain. It is held by one Vincent, a vassal of this old lord of Saluzzo. The old man has chosen to hate his elder son and has sent him prisoner to Pinerolo, and there Vincent keeps the man in a cage. So the old man must not see us turn to Pinerolo, brother. For we ride to set his son free."

"Holy mother!" Thibaut gasped. "Is that all? Have no fear, lord. If the old lord saw us at the gate of Pinerolo he would not guess what you have in your head. A castle to take and a cage to break and a man to bring out alive. And we be two! Tell me a thing. Was it I who drank of that white wine last night or you? By my head it was I. Then you have no excuse."

Silvain laughed. "It is a joyous venture, brother."

"As the puppy said when he ran at the mule. Give you joy of it! If ever you come to this man in his cage, it will be in chains to lie by him."

"Not alive, brother," Silvain said.

"Here is no good fortune but death." Thibaut reined up.

Silvain stopped too. "Your life is yours," he said. "Go your ways, wise man." He held out his hand. "You have served me well."

"Alas, my lord, never better than now," Thibaut groaned. "But you will not be served. Ride on, ride on. I am not wise enough to leave you. God guide us, we go into the dark."

"I see a star, brother," Silvain said.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAN IN THE CAGE

THEN warily they turned away from the mountains and rode fast, but none followed them or hindered them till, as the shadows lengthened, they saw the towers of Pinerolo set on a crag above the vineyards and mulberry trees. They came to a fork in the road and there a man sat his horse watching them. He was a squat, sturdy fellow, wearing a light helmet and breastplate. He grinned through his beard and shook his head at them. "God save you, friend," Silvain said.

"Peace be with you, child. Go your way." The man put his horse across the road to Pinerolo.

"Why, so I do," Silvain smiled.

The man shook his head and pointed to the other road.

"Sir, you lack courtesy," Silvain said gently. "Give me room."

The man grasped at his bridle and pulled his horse's head round. Silvain's sword gleamed. He struck with the flat, but the blow crashed from the man's helmet to the shoulder and brought him to the ground in a heap.

Silvain stood in the stirrups and looked all round. It seemed the man was alone. He sprang down and spread out the huddled body. It bore no wound. The man gasped and raised himself on one hand and groaned and stared at Silvain. "The devil! You have a heavy hand and quick," he said thickly. "The iron is in my head," he felt at his dented helmet. Silvain dragged it off, and he cried out at the pain and fell back. "I am spent. My head swims."

"Who is your lord, friend?" Silvain said.

Dull eyes stared at him. "Vincent of Pinerolo. I am his man."

Messire Thibaut made a grimace to the sky. "This is well begun, as the devil said when he fell from heaven."

But Silvain set the man on his feet. "Mount and ride, friend, we will bring you home."

The man reeled against him. "My head goes round and round," he groaned. "I cannot lift my arm. My shoulder is gone, I think."

So Silvain lifted him and gave him to Thibaut, and thus nursing him and leading his horse they came to the castle of Pinerolo. It rose from a lonely mass of rock in many towers grey in the twilight. As they began to climb the steep track to the gate, a warder challenged them and bade them stand. "I have an errand to your lord," Silvain shouted and had some while to wait for the answer.

"One man come up and speak."

Silvain rode on alone. "Cautious folk are you," he laughed. "I am a knight of France, Silvain de St. Lo. I bring you a man of yours who has fallen by the way."

Again he had to wait. Then he heard the groan of a rising portcullis and the gate was opened. He waited for Thibaut and the damaged man and they rode in together under the arch of the gate tower to a wide courtyard. The gate was closed. The portcullis crashed down behind them. Messire Thibaut looked back at its iron bars and shivered. "Now are we in," said he.

A man came forward who stroked his grey beard and smiled. "My poor house bids you welcome, Sir Silvain." He looked Silvain over. "I have heard of you. I am Vincent of Pinerolo." He made a low bow.

"Sir, you are gracious," Silvain said. "I ask your good will for this poor man of yours."

"That is Lippo, is it?" Vincent peered at the body huddled on Thibaut's saddle. "What ails you, child?"

The injured Lippo stirred and struggled to the ground. "He—he cut me down, captain," he said, and tottered and fell.

"The more fool you," the greybeard growled. "You are something quick, Sir Silvain."

"Why, sir, the poor man mistook me. For he ordered me off the road and then laid hands on my horse. And so this happened. He will do better another time. Do not punish him."

Vincent bent his bushy brows. "By my faith, I will believe all they tell of you. You are a mad fellow. Come in, come in." He took Silvain's arm and marched him into the hall.

It was a bare soldierly place with a rack of arms along the stone walls, sword and axe and mace, and a company of men-at-arms sat down below the salt. Large lumps of boiled beef smoked on the table, there were bowls of a mess of rice and beans and hams and cheese. "Hard fare, sir. We are plain fighting men in Pinerolo. But you are welcome." He poured wine for Silvain. "Though by my faith you come to do me an ill turn."

"What is that, sir?"

"Why, this fellow, Lippo. He was my right hand. Come, you thought him an insolent churl. But the man had his orders. We guard all the roads, for we want no strangers in Pinerolo. Oh, I know you, sir. You are a knight of honour. But how should he know? And it is a command from my lord the Marquis of Saluzzo that we keep strict watch."

"Sir, I hope that I shall not offend your lord."

"You—no, you are a knight of France, I think you do not come to strike for the lordship of Saluzzo," Vincent laughed. "But there are those in the land that do. And I have one of them here in a cage on the wall."

"Poor soul!" Silvain shrugged.

"He is damned," said Vincent placidly. "It is my

lord's own son who sought to take his father's place before the old man was dead. But my lord caught him and caged him here to think of his sin. And still my lord fears him, for the lad has many stout friends. So we watch well who comes to Pinerolo."

"And so you do. I will bear witness," said Silvain.

"But you have done me no good this day. For look, my men are few enough, and you have broken the best of them. Lippo will be good for nothing this long while. And he was the only man who could take my place an hour. By my faith, you owe me something, Sir Silvain."

"How shall I pay?"

"Why, are you in haste? Stay here in Pinerolo till Lippo is sound again and keep his watch."

"I can give you a day and another at least," Silvain said. "But, faith, sir, you trust me far. What do you know of me?"

"I have heard of you," Vincent smiled in his beard. "I have many friends in France. I served with the old King." And they talked of the wars of King Louis and his craft.

So when Silvain came to bed in the little room where Thibaut lay on the ground he was smiling. Messire Thibaut opened one eye and groaned. "Are you well, lord?" he said. "For I am not. This is too easy."

But Silvain slept soon and sound.

In the morning he was early afoot and out on the ramparts, and he found what he sought. By the gate-house tower half-way between the ground and the battlements, where no window nor embrasure was near, an iron cage was fixed to the wall. It was so small that a man could neither stand nor lie at length, and within a man sat crouching. The bars had no screen to hide him whatever he did, and sun and wind and rain must beat upon him, and his brown flesh showed through his rags.

Silvain walked to and fro and as he walked he sang

the psalm De profundis clamavi: "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice." The man in the cage stirred and looked up. Silvain saw a gaunt face in a tangle of matted hair and beard and wild eyes full of hate. The man cried out like an angry child and shook his fist. Silvain continued to sing: "In his word is my trust. My soul fleeth unto the Lord: before the morning watch, I say, before the morning watch." He paused smiling and looked again at the raging man in the cage and wandered into the gate-house tower.

When he came out again the man in the cage was still looking up. Silvain began to sing the psalm Benedictus Dominus: "Blessed be the Lord my strength: who teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight."

The grey head of the lord of Pinerolo came up the stair. "Why, lad, have you turned priest in the night?" he laughed. "It is long since we heard matins in Pinerolo."

"I like to sing in the sunshine," Silvain said. "And a psalm quickens the heart."

"You are a strange fellow." Vincent pulled his beard and his keen eyes darkened. "Psalms! Look at my lord in the cage there. He thinks the world has gone mad." For the man was contorted, trying to stand and twisting his head to stare at them.

"Well he may," Silvain said. "His life is torture. I pray you, why will his father keep him there for all to see his shame? There must be dungeons in Pinerolo."

"So there are, I warrant you," Vincent laughed. "But the cage is safer. A man in a dungeon may talk with his gaoler and no other hear them. There on the wall none speaks to him but all the castle hears. A man in a dungeon may play a trick and none see. There on the wall he does nothing but all the castle sees. Oh, he is safe there, are not you, my lord?" He leaned over the ramparts and laughed. "Sit you down, here is your breakfast."

A servant came with a loaf and a flask of wine and lowered them down on a cord. The man in the cage stretched out a lean arm and snatched and began to eat greedily.

"Sometimes we dangle them out of reach. That is good sport," said Vincent. "But he grows sullen."

Silvain turned away. "Every man has his hour. This is not his," he said. "But you have no need of me here. You hold him safe and sure."

"You think so?" Vincent laughed. "Mother of God, I take no risks. Well, come to breakfast. I am hungry as my rat in the trap there."

While they ate he expounded to Silvain his orders of the day. Every morning men were sent out to watch the roads about Pinerolo. It was the duty of the damaged Lippo to go the rounds and see that they were all at their posts and then take one himself, for men were scarce. The wretched Lippo lay in his bed: he was still mazed, his collar-bone was broken and his shoulder big and black. Would Silvain ride out in his stead?

"Do not blame me if you lose me," said Silvain. Vincent looked puzzled. "Why, sir, I do not know your country."

Vincent brought him a map of the land in the lordship of Pinerolo and gave him a lesson in geography.

So Silvain and Thibaut went out from the castle again. Messire Thibaut's dark face was much wrinkled and he wore one eyebrow up and the other down. "I pray you," said he, "if you wanted to be in why do you go out?"

"To please greybeard, brother," Silvain laughed.

"And pleased he is, for he has you out of his castle all day long."

"And he has shown me all that he has inside and out. And he will welcome me back at night. A kind man is he."

"Kind he is," Thibaut groaned, "and too kind. I do

not like him. He hath an eye, that greybeard, a cold, pale eye. He knows much."

"Me he does not know," Silvain said. "Have no fear, brother. I see far."

"So do not I. Nothing I see far or near. We go into the dark. Oh, my lord, you are a noble knight and great in arms, but nothing you know of men."

They went the rounds faithfully, found all Vincent's men at their posts and rode on to take the place of the damaged Lippo. But the only travellers they saw were country folk about their business in field and vineyard, and with them after his manner Silvain made friends, so that while Thibaut mounted guard for Lippo he was welcome in a farm-house. When he came out he had with him a rope of hide such as bound the loads on the bullock carts. This he wound about him under his breastplate and came again to Thibaut.

At sunset they rode back to the castle and found Vincent on the watch for them. "By my faith, sir, you live in a peaceful land. I saw no need of your guards," Silvain said.

"Who knows? The rogue there has bold friends," Vincent yawned. "But this is dull work for you, sir. I would I could show you better sport. I owe you something."

"I have had a good day," Silvain smiled.

"Come to supper and make a good night, lad," Vincent laughed. And he brought out a rare white wine and was merry.

That night when the castle was still Silvain rose and stole out of his room with the rope of hide. Into the hall he crept and took from the arms on the wall a mace. Then he climbed to the ramparts and after him came Thibaut, shivering but stealthily. Silvain made a round of the walls and found no men on watch. A light glimmered faint from the warder's room above the gate, but no sound stirred in all the castle.

The sky was clear and a young moon gave faint light.

Silvain stood above the cage and unbuckled his sword and hung the mace from his girdle. He loosed the hide rope and one end he looped over the battlements and made fast. He took the rope in hand and lowered himself till he stood upon the cage.

The man was cowering in a corner and Silvain heard him tremble. "A friend, my lord, a friend," he whispered. "Be still and of good courage." He lay down upon the cage and felt for the lock.

But the man was muttering as though he talked to himself, "It is a cheat. It is a cheat," and his teeth chattered and he groaned.

Silvain found the lock and he sat on the edge of the cage and took from his girdle the mace. He swung it high over his head and brought it down with all his might between his legs upon the lock. The crash was loud, but in that one blow the lock was broken away from the bolt. Silvain thrust the mace between the bars and forced the door open.

"Come, my lord, come. Now are you free."

But the man still cowered in his corner. "No, no, it is a trick. You mock me," he groaned and held on to the bars.

Silvain reached down into the cage and dragged him away to the open door and knotted the hide rope under his shoulders and pushed him out to swing at the end of it.

Above them Thibaut leaned over and whispered hoarsely, "Quick, quick."

"Hold fast, brother," Silvain said, and gripped the swinging rope and went up. Then Thibaut and he laid their weight upon it and hauled the man on to the ramparts.

But there was shouting and a scurry of feet up the stair and here and there lights gleamed.

"Away to the gate-tower, brother," Silvain said and lifted the rescued man to his feet. "Follow him, my lord. Run for your life." Thibaut caught the man's

hand and dragged him on with the rope trailing behind him.

Silvain buckled on his sword. Lanterns came out from the stairway to the ramparts, and among the lanterns he saw the grey beard of Vincent, and Vincent was laughing. "On them now, lads," he called. "Kill, kill! Here is our rat out. Good thanks, Master Silvain. You are my friend."

The men-at-arms ran upon Silvain, but they were confused by their own lantern light, and out of the dark he beat down the first that came and sprang back. "Where is your master?" he laughed. "Ho, my lord Vincent, a wise man are you and careful. You lead from behind. Kill, my lord, kill!"

They charged after him, along the narrow ramparts jostling one another. He beat a man down to crash on the stones of the courtyard below and broke away. "Where is your master? Behind, behind! A brave man he!" And the men-at-arms wavered and halted, looking behind them. Then Silvain sprang in upon them and struck down one and another and cried: "Go back, bring me your master. You serve a coward."

So he made them waver and won time to gain the gate-tower and there he stumbled on Thibaut. "What now, lord?" Thibaut panted. "Here is no escape. The warder has his guard there below. We cannot break through. And if we did the portcullis is down."

Vincent was raging after them. "Here is your coward, Master Silvain," he roared. "Stand fast, light of heel."

"Down the stair, brother. Into that upper room there," Silvain said, and thrust Thibaut and the rescued man in front of him through the narrow door.

They were in darkness which smelt musty and oily. Then their eyes found the faint moonlight come through two embrasures and show them a long narrow room built for the pulleys over which ran the ropes of the portcullis.

Silvain shut the door and drove his dagger under to hold it as a wedge and Thibaut did the like with his. "Another nail to the coffin," said he.

And now Vincent was beating upon the door and the noise of his laughter came between the blows. "Good thanks, Master Silvain," he said. "You have done your work."

"Do not thank me, my lord. Thank yourself who have served me well," Silvain said. "Never so easy a venture I hoped."

"Oh, fool," Vincent laughed, "I have played with you since first you came."

"And merry sport it has been," Silvain laughed. "Now, my lord!" He picked up Humbert, the rescued man, who still had the rope about his shoulders, and set him on the sill of the embrasure and tied the other end of the rope to a beam.

"Merry sport and a merry end, lad," Vincent cried. "Oh, Sir Silvain, bold are you and wise. My Lord Humbert, know your friend. Do him honour! He is a noble knight. He was sent to tempt you to escape that I could kill you clean and end all. A good deliverance, my lord! Do him honour before you go."

"It is a trap, a trap, I knew it," Humbert cried, and he fell upon Silvain and struck at him with empty hands. "You are my brother's man."

While so he fought the door was breaking from its hinges. Silvain mastered the man and thrust him upon the sill of the embrasure and over and out. He hung by the rope screaming and Silvain lowered him fast. "Down after him, brother," he caught at Thibaut, "then cut him loose and drop yourself and away."

He plucked out his sword and struck at the pulleys of the portcullis and smashed them. The door burst open. He sprang aside, he saw the lantern light, saw men-at-arms on the narrow winding stair, saw Vincent's grey head. "In on them now, lads," Vincent cried, but while he turned to send his men on before him Silvain leapt

forward crying, "A good deliverance!" Silvain's blade found him above his breastplate where the head joins the neck and as the press of his men bore him on he fell under their stumbling feet.

The rush was broken, Silvain sprang away, Silvain swung himself through the embrasure. The rope burnt his hand as he slid down and he was near the end of it before they cut it and he fell.

Thibaut helped him to his feet. "Where is our man, brother?" Silvain panted.

Out of the dark a faint voice said, "Here am I, sir. What would you have of me?"

"Forward, forward. On down the hill, my lord."

"And the faster the better, as the tortoise said to the snail. For they will be out upon us in a moment," quoth Thibaut.

But Silvain laughed. "I think not, brother. For they will not raise their portcullis this night. I broke the gear before I came."

Humbert turned and looked back. "It is Vincent who lies behind the bars," he said in a low voice. "Vincent has his cage now."

"None will deliver him, my lord. For his cage is death. But forward, forward. We must be far away at dawn."

CHAPTER XVI

DELIVERANCE

IT was hard going that night. Humbert was feeble of body from his long imprisonment and lack of food and he had no will to drive him on. They took him between them and bore much of his weight and still went slowly. But at last they came to a farm-house and roused the good man from his bed and Thibaut told a tale of horses fallen on the mountains and bid for three mules to go, as he said, to Pinerolo. The farmer charged him the worth of the beasts for the hire.

"So are we all happy," said Messire Thibaut. "For he thinks he has cheated me and I know I have cheated him."

And they mounted those mules and made for the mountains and were at dawn among the upland pastures. There they found the herds of the valley at their summer station, and the huts where the cows were milked and cheese made, and on barley bread and cheese and milk they fed, standing by their mules. Then they mounted again and rode on into the mountains till Humbert could keep the saddle no longer, and they slept like dead men. . . .

Humbert waked with a cry and clutched at Silvain, who sat beside him eating bread and cheese. "God give you peace, my lord," Silvain said gently.

"I was dreaming, then," Humbert muttered. "I dreamed that I was dying there in the cage. I have prayed for that," he looked at Silvain and there was fear in his eyes, "yet I feared it. I had no will to die. But it would have been easy, I think." He fidgeted and

looked away and plucked grass. "What is there for me now?" he muttered. "Now all is hard."

"You are an empty man," said Thibaut, and broke bread for him.

"Have you no will to live, my lord?" Silvain said.

"Why did you save me? What do you hope of me? I am broken and spent."

"It is in my mind that you have done me a wrong," said Silvain. "You said that I came to cheat you and brought you into a trap. That was not gracious of you, that was not noble, my lord."

Humbert looked at him bewildered and afraid. "I thought you came to deliver me to death: to tempt me to escape that Vincent might kill me."

"I cannot excuse you," said Silvain coldly. "You shall account to me for this, my lord."

"In the name of God, why did you come?" Humbert cried.

"You ask that who lay in a cage last night and now breathe free. Your heart is cold, my lord."

"Free? I am free to be hunted till I die. Yes, by my faith, my heart is cold."

"Who should hunt you?"

Humbert stared at him. "My brother is master in Saluzzo. He will not let me live."

"Your brother sent me to deliver you."

"I knew it," Humbert cried. "You are my brother's man."

"By the faith of God, no man is master of me," said Silvain. "Come, my lord, open your mind. What have you against your brother? But for him you would still lie in your cage."

"But for him I had never been in it. It was he taught my father to hate me. My father is a hard man and he and I were well enough till Felix grew up. My father used to mock at him for his womanish ways, and Felix was full of spite against him and would come to me for comfort. I stood by him as I could, my Lady Yolande

and I. He won upon her and she turned to him. My God, she has been for him many a day now. Then Felix came to me and told of a plot he had to seize my father and make me lord of Saluzzo, and he swore that he had all the town ready to strike for me. But I would not. And then he wept and made me swear I would not betray him, for he meant to serve me. Sir, it was he who betrayed me. On a day soon after Yolande ran to me in a frenzy and said that my father was raging against me and calling me traitor and she begged me to fly for my life. So I took horse and rode away."

"That was not nobly done," said Silvain.

Humbert groaned. "The woman worked upon me. I trusted her. Mock me, you have the right. I rode out of Saluzzo and after me came a troop of my father's men and caught me. They told me that Felix had warned my father I was plotting to raise the town against him. I cried out that it was all a lie and wrought with them that they should bring me to my father and let me speak. But they would not, they had their orders. They carried me off to Pinerolo, and there in a while came Vincent and put me in his cage. Then I had no more hope. For Vincent was Felix's man."

"Yet this Felix sent me to set you free," Silvain said.

"My God, do you not know him yet? He coveted my death. Vincent dared not kill me while my father lived, and always there was the chance my father might set me free. But if I broke out and tried to escape Vincent could make an end of me and no blame. Why, you heard him last night. He thanked you that you gave him the chance to kill me."

"It is so. But the man was vile and bitter. This is a dark story, my lord. You have had ill fortune. God give you grace. You live yet."

"For how long?"

"To-morrow is another day, as the knight said when he ran away," quoth Thibaut.

"There is no man you trust in Saluzzo, my lord?"

"No man—nor woman neither."

"God deliver you, you are still in your cage," Silvain said. "Fare you well."

"What, you leave me now? I am naked and alone."

"My lord, I ride to win honour and I have no honour yet of this venture. I go to Saluzzo. Follow after with my brother Thibaut, and wait for news of me where the road comes down from the mountains." He mounted his mule and made off.

It was drawing towards evening when he rode into Saluzzo. He left his mule in the town and came to the castle afoot, like a wandering soldier seeking one who would hire him, and humbly he asked for my Lord Felix, saying that he had news for him. One of the lounging servants at the gate—they were many and pampered at Saluzzo—deigned at last to stroll off with the message. He came back in a hurry, red about the ears, and at a round pace Silvain was marched through the castle. On the way he had to stand aside to make way for the Lady Yolande passing from the chapel to her lodging. She looked at him gravely, but if in the humble dusty soldier at the lacquey's heels she knew the knight-errant of the mountains, she gave no sign.

Felix was leaning from a window above. When Yolande had gone in he beckoned impatiently. Silvain climbed the stair at his leisure, but the servant hurried on to say breathless, "He is here, my lord. He is coming."

"Get you gone to the devil," Felix cried, and the man slunk down again as Silvain came to the doorway. There he halted and lifted his hand in salute. Felix pulled him in and shut the door. "What brings you back?" he said in a low voice.

"Why, my lord, did you think I should not come back? By my faith, it was a hard venture and dark."

"Where is my brother?"

Silvain smiled. "God knows, my lord. It is only I who come back to Saluzzo."

"My God, you have failed! Speak out, man. Did you lose heart? Did you flinch from it? Have you done nothing?"

"I have done your will, my lord," Silvain said and he smiled.

"You set him free?" Felix grew pale and licked his lips and stared at the smiling face. "It is not true!" he cried.

"I said I had done your will. Judge you if I told the truth. I came to Pinerolo and in the night I broke open the cage where your brother lay and brought him out. But then Vincent rushed upon us with all his men crying, 'Kill, kill,' and I hardly escaped them letting myself down the wall. So I come back from that venture alone." He laughed. "It is in my mind that you owe me something, my lord Felix."

"Vincent killed him?" Felix drew back. "He is dead?"

"And was not that your will, my lord?" Silvain smiled. "Who told Vincent that I was coming to Pinerolo?"

"Oh, villain!" Felix cried. "You have murdered my brother." He leaned from the window and shouted, "Guard, guard!" and drew his dagger and turned to face Silvain.

But Silvain was gone. Down the stairs he went and the shouts of Felix pursued him. As he came to the courtyard he heard the clank of arms and turned and darted into the lodging of the Lady Yolande.

She stood listening to the shouts when Silvain broke in upon her. He shut the door and locked it and stood facing her. "It is you then," she said very still and calm.

"My life is in your hand this night," Silvain said.

"Why do you come to me?"

"I seek one in Saluzzo to trust."

"Trust none in Saluzzo."

"Whose woman are you, lady?"

"I am my own. What is it to you, Sir Silvain?"

"I am not here for myself. I am not thinking of myself."

She laughed. "That I believe, sir."

Feet sounded on the stair. Silvain drew his sword, but she frowned at him and laid her finger on her lips and signed him to a curtain in the wall. He found himself in her bedroom and she closed the door upon him. The outer door was tried and there was knocking. "Yolande!" Felix cried. "Yolande, are you there?"

"Why, yes. What a din!" she said and turned the key. "What ails you, cousin?"

Felix broke in, stumbling upon her and glared round the empty room. "How long have you been here?"

"An hour. Two hours. How should I know? What does it matter?"

"And your door locked all the while?"

She stared at him. "And my door locked, cousin. That was because I chose to be alone. I still choose it."

"No one has been in here?"

"Do you wish to be impudent, Felix? For you are."

"I am not. There is a vagrant soldier playing the rogue in the castle and I feared for you. I thought he came up your stair."

"I thank you for your fears, cousin. There is no soldier here unless you are one. I suppose your man is out and away by now."

Felix turned and ran out, calling to his men. Yolande locked the door again and went into her bedroom. "I lie well, do I not, Sir Silvain?" she said. "One learns that in Saluzzo."

Silvain flushed. "I am shamed that I made you lie. But indeed it was not for my own sake."

"How do you know that?" she laughed.

"Lady, I am not here to please myself," Silvain stammered.

"I thank you. Nor to please me either it seems. In fact, why are you here? For certainly you have not

pleased Felix. My friend, he will have your life yet, if he finds you."

Silvain recovered himself. Silvain smiled. "He will do his endeavour, by God's grace."

"What have you done to him that he is so bold against you?"

"I have found him out and he knows it. Do you know what manner of man he is?"

"He has wooed me, sir," she said and flushed.

"That is another thing I cannot forgive him," said Silvain. "There are enough."

"It was he taught his father to hate my lord Humbert."

"If a man went to the old lord and told him that Humbert was loyal and true and Felix a knave, what would come of it, lady?"

"That man would hang," she said and laughed bitterly. "Oh, sir, you do not know us in Saluzzo. My lord Marquis believes no good of any man alive. It is by that Felix has won upon him, teaching him to hate and fear."

"Here is one who has kept her heart clean." Silvain knelt and kissed her hand. "Have courage, lady. Humbert is free." He felt her hand shake and grow cold. She turned away.

"Do not play with me," she said. "Where is he then?"

"He has escaped and is away in the mountains."

"Is that what you told Felix?"

Silvain smiled. "No, lady. For I told him Humbert was dead."

"And why that?" She was bewildered.

"Patience, lady. It is Felix's move. I see far."

"You have told him what he longed to hear."

"That I know well."

"Now he will count himself lord in Saluzzo."

"And what of his father? The old lord lives yet."

"He does what Felix wills."

"Yet he did not kill Humbert. I wonder if Felix has told him that Humbert is dead."

"My God, I must know that!" she cried and started to the door.

But Silvain caught her hand. "Tell him nothing that I have told. You have heard nothing."

"Do not fear. I can play a part." She hurried away and locked the door on him.

Silvain stood by the window and looked out. Night was falling and lights shone from the houses in the town. Many people were out in the streets and there came to him a murmur of noise. When it grew darker he leaned from the window and measured his distance from the ground.

The key turned in the lock. Yolande swept in. "The old lord has shut himself in his oratory," she said. "He will let no one come to him. All the castle has heard that Humbert is dead. They chatter in the courtyard like rooks. Tell me that he is safe. Swear it!"

"By my honour, he is alive and safe in the mountains," Silvain said gravely and then he smiled. "So Master Felix has told his tale."

"Felix is out in the town. They say he swears to hunt down the murderers."

"Then it is time for me to go."

"You cannot pass. The courtyard is full of men."

Silvain laughed and climbed out of the window and scrambled down the wall. He made his way to a humble tavern on the outskirts of the town and filled himself with bread and wine. The woman told him that it was a black day for Saluzzo because the good Lord Humbert had been killed in his prison.

"God rest his soul," said Silvain. "You loved this lord well, mother?"

"He was kindly. All the town loved him."

And Silvain thought: "That Felix said in the beginning. He did not always lie, the wise Felix." He went out into the main streets and mingled with the crowd.

They had the story clear. The old lord, who always hated Humbert because he loved the people, had sent men to Pinerolo to murder him in his prison. And this the old lord hoped to keep secret for he feared the people. But the knave who brought him news of the murder boasted of it to the good lord Felix. So all was known. And Felix was in the cathedral praying for his brother's soul, and had sworn to avenge him. And every man in Saluzzo would follow him, for they loved Humbert, a gracious lord, a kindly lord and gentle.

Silvain slid out of the crowd. "Yes, Felix is wise," he said to himself and he smiled as he strode away to the mountains.

In the morning when Messire Thibaut and Humbert came riding warily and slowly down the mountain track they saw far off a man whose hair shone in the sunlight. He made quick gestures to them and shouted. "Forward, forward!"

Humbert drove his mule on. "What is it? What news, Silvain? Are they hunting me?"

"No man hunts you, my lord. No man knows that you are near. Ride on fast to Saluzzo. This is your hour."

"To Saluzzo!" Humbert stopped. "But Felix—is he not there? And my father?"

"Felix is there yet. Ride on and match yourself against him."

"Are you mad? My father would have me caged again."

"It is Felix who rules in Saluzzo."

"Felix!" Humbert flushed. "My father is dead?"

"Not yet. But Felix is master to-day. For they have heard that you are killed and your father has gone to prayers and Felix takes all in his hand."

"And you bid me go to Saluzzo? We be three men and he holds castle and town. What would you have me do?"

"Ride into Saluzzo and claim your right."

"Then I go to my death."

"Better die for your right than yield it and slink away."

"I am no coward, Silvain!" Humbert muttered and his eyes flinched. "But I have no hope in me."

"It is man against man this day, my lord. You or he, which is the better? Choose now."

"Mother of God, what can I do against him?" Humbert cried. "There is no man in Saluzzo who will stand for me."

"Do you trust none yet?" said Silvain. "Alas, my lord, you are still in your cage."

Humbert cried out like a man in pain. Then "Forward!" he said hoarsely. "Forward, and end it all."

Silvain held his mule's bridle. "Well chosen, my lord. I have here a horse and a cloak that I have brought for you."

"To cover my rags?" Humbert laughed. "No, not I. Forward! This is a beggar's venture and like a beggar I go." And so, riding a mule, clothed in squalid rags through which his lean body broke, he lead them to Saluzzo, and Silvain mounted his horse and rode behind singing.

The townsfolk of Saluzzo were early afoot that day, and in the morning a crowd gathered about the castle. When Felix came out from the cathedral, where he had heard mass, he talked awhile with the chief men of the town and called for the castle gates to be opened. The crowd surged in slowly and the men-at-arms on guard did not withstand them, but mingled with them in the courtyard.

Felix went on before and found the old lord coming out of his oratory wan and shaking. He caught at his son's arm. "What is the noise in the courtyard, boy?"

"Come and see, my lord."

Felix led him to the window and he looked out and looked long. "All the rabble of the town!" he muttered. "What is this, in God's name?"

"Humbert," said Felix. "Oh, sir, the voice of my brother's blood cries from the ground."

The old man swayed against the window. "You loved him well, did you not?" he muttered.

"God forgive me that I did not love him better. I might have saved him from you, my lord."

"You—you save him!" the old man laughed. "Yes, you were always his friend. And mine too. It is your nature, Felix." The crowd was growing noisy. "Holy St. Ambrose, who brought this rabble here?"

"Who could keep them out?" said Felix sadly. "My lord, we have all the town upon us. They have heard that Humbert is killed and they loved him well. They cry for vengeance."

"With all my heart," the old man said. "That knave Vincent shall not die an easy death."

"Alas, my lord, you will not save yourself so. They call you murderer. Hark!"

The murmur of the crowd rose loud: "Humbert! Humbert! Justice for Humbert!"

The old lord looked out of the window and when the people saw his face they howled at him, "Murderer! Murderer!"

He fell back, he caught at Felix with trembling hands. "Oh, villain! This is your work too!"

"I, my lord? I would die to save you. And indeed I will save your life if yet I can. But the people are fierce against you. Something you must yield or they will have your blood this day. For God's sake, sir, make some atonement."

"Humbert! Humbert! The murderer of Humbert!" the crowd rumbled.

"Hark, my lord, there is no holding them," Felix said. "Holy Mother, do not tempt them more. You will find a shameful death. Torn by the mob—a lord of Saluzzo! Let me tell them that you go to the monastery of St. Ambrose to do penance for my brother's murder and I may save you yet."

"To the monastery!" the old man cried. "Oh, it is my soul you will save. You are pious, Felix. Your brother is dead, your father a monk, and honest Felix is lord in Saluzzo. No, by God. Kill me too."

"Humbert! Humbert! The murderer of Humbert!" the crowd growled.

A shout rang clear through the din. "Room for the lord Humbert! Room!"

Into the courtyard rode that shaggy, ragged man on his mule and behind him Silvain stood in his stirrups and shouted, "The Lord Humbert is alive and here. Look upon him!"

Felix dashed his father aside and leaned from the window. "Who is this beggar man that mocks you?" he screamed. "Pull the knave down!"

From the window of her lodging the Lady Yolande looked out and she cried, "Humbert! My lord Humbert! Welcome, welcome home!" She held out her arms to him.

Then the crowd pressed about him, and those who knew him best fought to come to him and kissed his hands. "Do you remember me yet, my children?" he laughed. "Yes, yes, it is I, and I am a glad man this day."

The old man thrust by Felix to look and called, "Humbert, Humbert, my son! Come to me."

Felix stood back in the shadow biting his hands.

Silvain pushed his horse through the crowd and made way and so they came to the stair, and Silvain dismounted and stood aside and Humbert went up, but after him Silvain followed close.

The old man stumbled to the door to meet him crying, "My son, my son!" and Humbert took him in his arms. "Forgive me yet," the old man muttered, hiding his face.

As they stood locked together Felix stole up behind, with his dagger in his hand. He shouted, "Help! help! My father has murdered him," and struck.

A sword shot past them and bore him back. Silvain sprang into the room and struck again and beat him down. "You owed me something, my lord Felix. It is paid," he said.

"Holy saints defend us!" The old man clung to Humbert. "Why, you are the man who fought for the baby goat!"

"That was the beginning of the venture, my lord," Silvain said. He put up his sword and crossed himself and looked down at Felix. "God in his mercy be gracious to you," he said, "for you were slain in your youth."

Yolande came running up the stair calling, "Humbert! Humbert!" and cast her arms about him and drew him to her bosom.

"And that is the end of the venture," said Silvain. "Now are you out of your cage." He strode past them and his feet sounded on the stair.

It was a moment before they knew he was gone, and when they called to him he had mounted and was pushing his horse through the crowd. Yolande saw him ride out through the shadows of the gateway into the sunshine.

"What, has he left us now?" the old man said. "By my faith, he is a mad fellow, this saint of the goats. I would have made him rich."

"What should I give him?" Humbert said. "He has given me my soul."

Yolande smiled through tears. "He gives, he does not take. He has the sunshine."

And Silvain sang as he rode, "Blessed be the Lord my strength who teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight."

CHAPTER XVII

THE CASTLE OF VERRÉS

BELOW the vineyards, where the elms gave shade, Messire Thibaut sat mending a hole in his breeches. It is not a situation in which men are seen at their best. Thibaut was aware of it and with tears in his voice accused his master.

"Look what you have made of me, lord," his long gaunt legs came bare out of his coat of mail, "here I squat like a stricken stork, who am a man for my sins and a knight's squire. What is a man without breeches? But I must cut the legs to patch the seat. My skin is through my breeches to-day, to-morrow my bones will be through my skin. God forgive you, my lord, before I rode with you I was happy, as the flea said to me yesterday."

Silvain lay on his back by the stream singing softly, "All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him for ever."

Thibaut groaned. "Have you the price of a loaf in your scrip?" Silvain laughed and went on singing. "Beggars we are. Oh, my lord, was it this you promised me when you bade me ride with you to fortune?"

"We have won honour, brother," Silvain said gently.

"We pull down the stag, said the hound, but never we eat the haunch. It is a dog's life. Look, lord, we have won ladies and lands and gold for many a man, but I must patch my breeches and ride a starvling mule, and you go like a poor man-at-arms seeking hire, no shield nor lance, only your dinted breastplate upon you and a helm without a plume, and a little farmer's horse to carry you. This is honour."

"Yet my sword is bright," Silvain said. "Patience, brother. Let me live my life. I shall see fortune ere I die."

"Lie in the gutter, you may see the moon," Thibaut groaned and put on his breeches. "Beggars are we. Let us work at our trade. Where shall we beg supper this night?"

"Forward!" Silvain sprang up. "There is always a venture ahead."

They mounted and drove their reluctant beasts from the rich pasture to the road. That road was busy—in two miles they met four men on horseback—for it led out of Italy up to the pass of the Great St. Bernard. Thibaut pulled up to ask each traveller if they could find good fare ahead. The first horseman, who was a merchant with heavy saddle bags, stared at the worn warriors. "What are you, friend?" he said. "What would you have?"

"Here is a noble knight and his squire, fellow," Thibaut glared.

"Why, then, go to Verrés," the man chuckled. "There is the place for you. Good fortune, most noble," and off he went.

Then they came upon three riding together, men-at-arms well mounted and resplendent. These were in no hurry, these saluted them with flourishes and chuckled. "Good fare ahead, my lord?" one of them took up Thibaut's question. "Why, not worthy of you." He made a bow to Silvain. "Not what his excellency is used to. Be gentle with them, I pray you, they are poor simple folk at Verrés. But they will be proud you do them honour."

"Sir, do you serve the Lord of Verrés?" Silvain said.

"Alas, no, excellency. Once I hoped that I might. But now I know it can never be." His companions laughed loud. "God-speed your highness." He saluted again profoundly and they rode on chattering and chuckling.

"There are merry men on this road," said Silvain.

"Who would not laugh at my breeches!" said Thibaut. "Where is this Verrés?"

They found it where three valleys mingled their vineyards, their corn and their orchards, a little village by the river with a great grey castle above guarding the entry to the three.

"He should be rich, this lord of Verrés," said Thibaut. "With three fat valleys to feed him and toll of three roads to take. He does not patch his breeches."

To the castle they came and Thibaut blew the horn at the gate. A trumpet answered from within. When the gate was opened they saw on either side men gay in bright mail coats over a livery of blue and gold. Between their ranks stood one who wore the same colours in a robe, a tall grave man. He looked keenly at Silvain: there was some surprise in his face as he said, "I am Andrea, the seneschal of Verrés, my lord."

"I am Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of France."

The seneschal bowed. "Sir, you have come a long journey."

"I ride to win honour."

"God give you good fortune, my lord. I pray you, come in."

The seneschal led them to a large antechamber hung with tapestries in blue and gold. Much silver shone on the table holding fruit and sweetmeats and wine, and two men sat at this feast each with a squire behind his chair. They were gorgeous creatures, their breastplates chased and inlaid with gold, jewelled hands flashing from velvet sleeves of scarlet and purple. They looked amazement at the shabby pair and one of them tittered and the other grinned.

"Where did you find this, Andrea?" said the grinning man. He was red and lusty, a full-blown creature, too big to wear finery.

"My lord Luca of Biella, my lord Antonio of

Casale," the seneschal announced formally, "Sir Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of France."

Silvain bowed, Antonio, a sleek pale man, waved his hand. Luca laughed. "But who is the other cavalier?" said he.

"Sir, I present you to Thibaut my squire," said Silvain.

"Oh, I thought he was a French knight too," Luca grinned.

The seneschal set a chair for Silvain and poured him wine and went out. The two fine gentlemen moved themselves together to the other side of the table and stared at Silvain as if he were a curiosity.

Then Antonio said, "I have heard that a Frenchman once went to heaven, Luca."

"Fie, you believe anything you hear. How could it be?"

"He lost his way. So he said. It is a long way from France. He was seeking his fortune. That is why he left France, of course. But he was not at his ease in heaven, poor soul."

"So they sent him to hell, I suppose?"

"How wise you are, Luca. To hell they sent him and he was happy. He liked the company. He was at home again."

"You make me sad, my lords," said Silvain gently. "For I ride to win honour. And I fear there is little to be won of you."

"Already he feels uneasy!" Antonio tittered.

"What you win of me you may keep," said Luca.

The seneschal stood at the door. "My lord Luca," he bowed, and Luca and his squire went out. Then it was the turn of Antonio, and last of all Silvain was led away.

He was brought to a room of luxury. The walls were painted in fresco with gods and goddesses, the ceiling with a sky at sunset. The chairs were carved with

fine craft. Curtains of golden silk hid the bed. But he was not allowed to linger there. The seneschal pointed him on to an inner chamber filled with a fragrant steam. There stood a big bath of hammered brass.

The seneschal bowed gravely and swept out.

"These are dainty folk," said Thibaut. "We come to supper and they bid us bathe ourselves. It is rude." He looked round the room and sniffed. "Oh, they live grand. I would give all their grandeur for a knuckle of ham."

Silvain let himself down into the scented water and sighed content.

"You are meek," said Thibaut with contempt. "I would wash myself to please no man."

"But when you are made a knight, brother, you must go into the bath and keep vigil on your knees."

"It is a good life for those that like it, as the wolf said when he saw the hounds whipped. But what is this of knighthood? You are a knight already. Why should old solemn-face give you a bath?"

"I cannot tell. Perhaps he hath some great venture for me, by God's grace."

"He! His face is the colour of whey and as sour," Thibaut grumbled. "By my soul, this is a queer castle where he patters about sad and solemn and two jackanapes mock at us."

"I like it well," Silvain smiled. "I see fortune here."

"And I—I do not see my supper."

In a while there came a tap at the door and Thibaut opened it to see the seneschal standing with a white robe in his hands. This he gave to Thibaut and said, "Sir, tell your lord that I wait to bring him to the chapel."

Thibaut shambled to his master in the bath and held out the white robe and made a grimace. "Now go do penance, says he. This is a merry house."

Silvain stood up and dried himself and put on the robe. It was of silk and covered him from head to heel.

"It is not a knight they make you, but a white friar," Thibaut groaned.

Silvain came to the seneschal. "I follow you, sir," and he took his sword.

The grave face looked at it. "You go to prayers, my lord."

"With all my heart," Silvain smiled. "Sir, I cannot tell what you would have of me. But this is like the making of a knight. First I must go into the bath, then I must go to church. I am content. I shall be the cleaner body and soul. I do not know what honour you have for me. But when a man keeps vigil on the eve of his knighthood, he prays by his sword. And so will I now."

"It is well said, sir. So keep your vigil," the seneschal bowed and led on.

Candles burnt on the altar but nowhere else in the chapel. By that dim light Silvain saw two white shapes lolling at ease in the stalls by the wall. Luca and Antonio had also been washed and brought to pray. But they kept the vigil lightly. Silvain came to the altar and kissed the cross hilt of his sword and laid it down and knelt there.

From the two white figures in the stalls came a murmur of talk and laughter. For some time they amused themselves while Silvain knelt on the stones still and silent, then they rustled out together, and Luca as he went brought a handful of holy water and splashed it over Silvain. "Bless your pure soul, my child," he said.

Silvain did not move. It was long after when he had finished his prayers.

The candle in his room was burnt low. Thibaut lay on the ground and waking at his footstep rolled solemn eyes at him. "Have you killed this household, lord?" he yawned. "For you should. Look! There is all your supper." Bread and wine stood on the table. "Pity me, this is no house for men."

But Silvain ate and drank and gave thanks and slept like a child.

There was more bread and wine brought them in the morning and a bunch of grapes too. "Every day is a fast day in Verrés," Thibaut groaned. "Grapes, God have mercy, grapes! I pray you, who is it keeps house here? A week of this would break a man's heart."

In a while the seneschal came and said, "My lady will hear you, Sir Silvain. God give you good fortune."

Silvain put on his dinted breastplate and buckled on his sword and followed him.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LADY OF THE CASTLE

THEY came to a room the walls of which were marble the colour of peach-blossom framed in black columns. The windows were hidden behind curtains of blue and gold. Statues gleamed here and there, amazons, Greek gods, and at one end a noble thing, a stately woman draped and veiled. Before it stood a chair like a throne, with cushions of cloth of gold, and that was the only chair.

Luca and Antonio lounged among the statues, more gorgeous than when Silvain saw them first. They had shed their breastplates. The ruddy Luca was in a doublet of crimson and silver, one lusty leg silver and the other crimson, Antonio all amber. Antonio looked at Silvain, grey in his steel and faded hose, and sighed and smelt at a box of scent.

"My lord Luca, my lord Antonio, Sir Silvain de St. Lo," the seneschal was saying, "do you come clean in body and soul to my lady? This it is my office to ask you."

"Clean am I," said Luca.

"Else I would not dare," said Antonio softly.

"Sir, I am not come to do her wrong," said Silvain.

The seneschal bowed and went out. In a moment the doors were flung open by men in the livery of blue and gold. A woman came in who wore a golden gown. She was slight and tall and moved as though she were borne on without effort of hers. Her face was small, delicately wrought, and beneath a splendour of amber hair bound in a jewelled net seemed pure white, but her lips

were of a dark crimson, and her brown eyes had in them a strange red fire. She sank down on her chair.

"I am Helena of Verrés, my lords. Who are you that come to me?"

"I am Luca of Biella," the big man smiled. "You know me well, Lady Helena."

"I have seen many men," she lay back languidly. "What would you have of me?"

"Yourself. I am here to woo you and win you, my queen."

"So many a man has said. Do your endeavour." She turned her eyes from him.

Antonio knelt at her feet. "I have heard of your beauty far away in Rome, lady. But the half has not been told me. I am Antonio of Casale and I come to serve you and pray for your love."

"Pray and serve. You have my leave." She looked carelessly at Silvain who stood silent.

"Lady, I am Silvain de St. Lo, a poor knight of France, and I ride to win honour. So I came asking alms on my way."

Luca burst out laughing. "Honest fellow! Here is for you." He fumbled in the purse at his girdle and held out a gold ducat.

"Sir, I have to ask something of you, but it is your sword, not your gold, that I would see," said Silvain gently.

"You brag, sir," the lady said. "It does not commend you. I will give you a trial to prove yourself."

"Lady, you will do your pleasure, but I trust my honour to no hand but mine," said Silvain.

Luca went down on one knee. "I pray you let me deliver you from this insolence, noble lady."

"He shows what he is," she said coldly. "It is for that you are all here. I need no champions, sir. I can guard myself."

"It is a queen who speaks!" Antonio cried.

She smiled. "What do you bring to your queen?"

"My life and land," cried Luca, and he strode forward with a great silver casket. "Here is tribute from Biella." She opened it, drew out a gold chain studded with jewels and laid it carelessly aside and bowed to him.

"I bring you my heart," cried Antonio, and smiling took from his bosom a little golden box. She found in it one great ruby, and smiled and laid the stone a moment on her breast and looked down at the glow on her white skin.

"You have a pretty fancy, my lord," she said, and looked at Silvain. "You, sir, what do you give me?"

"Alas, my lady, I have not come to give but to take."

She stood up. "My lords, you are welcome in Verrés," she said. "I wish you joy in your endeavours." She smiled and swept out.

Silvain saw the seneschal beckoning to him. "Go your ways, good fellow," Luca laughed. "You have your answer sharp and soon."

"A blessed deliverance," said Antonio, and put his nose into his scent box.

Silvain was led back to his room. The seneschal came in with him and shut the door. "I pray your pardon, sir," he said earnestly. "I have led you astray. I thought that you came as the other knights come, a suitor to win my lady."

"Are there many who have come to Verrés?"

A smile crossed the grave face. "Many have come—and gone, sir."

"Your lady is hard to win?"

"It is not for me to judge my lady. Her father, the Count Alessandro, made her swear by her honour that she would marry no man till she had proved him."

"He was wise," Silvain smiled. "But did he say how a woman should prove a man?"

"Sir, my lady also is wise."

"And so she has no husband."

The seneschal frowned. "And so, sir, though many

men have come to woo her, all have failed in the trials she has for them."

"Yet still they come?"

"Sir, I think you will not wonder at that. You have seen her. All the young lords of Savoy and Lombardy, yes, and from Tuscany and Venice, they must try for the Lady Helena."

"But never one pleases her?"

"Never one yet who has not failed in her tests."

"What would she have of a man?"

The grave eyes met Silvain's smile. "I do not know her heart, sir. But I talk too much. You see how it goes with us here in Verrés. My lady's fame has gone far, and always we have young lords coming to venture themselves for her. So when you rode in I thought you also were a suitor, and therefore I gave you the bath and the vigil which is ordered for all and brought you before her. I ask your pardon."

"Pardon for nothing."

"But you are not here for her sake, sir."

"It is true. Who told you so?"

The seneschal smiled. "A man does not come to a woman he woos as you came to her."

"By my faith, I cannot tell, for I have never desired a woman. It is true, I came to Verrés for a supper and a bed. I did not know you had a lady. But what now, sir? Do you bid me go?"

The seneschal sat silent. "You know what is in your heart," he said at last and he looked at Silvain. "I must think of my lady's honour. You have seen her."

"But I have not proved her," Silvain smiled. "Sir, I am not wont to turn my back on a challenge. This is a strange, fair venture." The seneschal's face was flushed and anxious. "Have no fear. It is of my honour I think."

"Sir, God give you good fortune," said the seneschal and left him, and Silvain fell to burnishing his breastplate and his sword.

So he was working when Messire Thibaut broke in upon him. "Do you know who rules here, my lord?" he cried. "It is a woman."

"It is Helen of Troy, Helen the beautiful, the desire of all the world," Silvain smiled.

"Pity me!" Thibaut groaned. "I thought she was dead a thousand years, when all the world went to war for her. But true it is this lady brings many lovers to her castle."

"Here are we, brother," Silvain smiled.

"And when she is weary of them she casts them out. What shall we do here, lord?"

"We shall stay, brother," said Silvain.

Thibaut groaned, and crooned to himself a ballad about a queen who had lover after lover, and sewed them in sacks and flung them into the river. From this he diverged into a demonstration that no house which a woman rules is fit to live in, for unless a man is master, said he, no man can get enough to eat.

CHAPTER XIX

THE THREE TRIALS

BUT even Messire Thibaut confessed that the dinner to which they sat down that day was well enough. It was spread in a hall larger by far than my lady's hall of audience and more splendid, for the walls were glittering mosaics of the triumphs of Venus and saints going up into heaven, scenes sacred and profane in a riot of colour. The women who served my lady Helena, a buxom company, made merry with her men-at-arms. Gold and silver flashed on the tables, and the cooks had done marvellous deeds with peacocks and swans and palaces of pastry, and were subtle with better things, ortolans and quails with white truffles, and chamois and eels and trout and agoni from the mountain lakes. White wine of the hills, red wine of the plain flowed fast, wine of Cyprus and of Naples, wine tasting of plums and wine tasting of rosemary, and bowls of a liquor frothing with eggs and sugar but sharpened by a tang of a spirit of herbs.

In her great chair at this feast the lady Helena sat eating little sticks of bread and olives and fruit and sipping wine from a cup full of snow. She had the seneschal on her right hand, her chaplain on the other, and across the table Luca and Antonio and Silvain faced her side by side. Antonio shone, with pretty compliments, with wit, with anecdotes he shone, and Luca struggled in vain to put him down by bludgeon jokes. Helena played with the little man pleasantly and brought the best out of him and kept Luca in hand the while. But Silvain took no part in it. He talked quietly

with the woman at his side, the mistress of Helena's wardrobe, about the flowers on the mountains and the music in churches and the age at which a boy should wear his first armour.

It seemed to him that they had been hours at that feast, but Antonio was still being brilliant and Luca was still eating and drinking, when the musicians in the gallery played a louder strain, and into the hall came a troop of damsels arrayed in white Greek robes with silver girdles and silver bows to dance as Diana and her huntress nymphs. They made a pretty show till they were surprised by merry youths in blue and gold and fled, to be brought back struggling and whirled into a wilder dance. Women and men left their places to join in it, tables were thrust aside, and the hall was full of merry tumult.

"Can you sit still, my queen?" cried Luca. "So cannot I." He drank off his wine, sprang to his feet, caught the prettiest woman at the high table and swept her away.

"Who lights a candle when he can see the sun?" Antonio smiled at Helena.

She was lying back in her chair watching the dancers placidly. "He is the wise man, Antonio," she said. "He is not afraid to be happy."

"Is it wise to be happy on earth or hope for heaven?" said Antonio.

"Oh, you are a saint, sir," she smiled, "but our Luca is a man and alive."

"I am sworn to live for none but you," Antonio languished.

"I thank you! What a ghost of a man do you bring me."

"It is a challenge," Antonio started up. "Live in this dance with me."

"You are too bold, sir." She frowned. "You have not proved yourself yet."

Antonio made her a bow and strutted away and,

choosing a girl who had turned many men away, made ardent love to her and at last, half by force, drew her out with him.

The music was wilder, the dance grew boisterous, women were swung off their feet, hugged, tossed on men's shoulders and borne round the hall on high in struggling, laughing disorder.

Silvain sat in his place silent and grave, and at last Helena's eyes met his and he saw the red in them gleam. "You have my leave to go," she said. He made her a bow and went out.

In the morning early the seneschal found him walking on a terrace from which he could see the mountains. "Sir, my lady bids you ride with her to-day."

"I am here to serve her."

"And also I am to tell you that in your first trial you have failed." The seneschal was uncomfortable. "Such is her judgment, my lord."

"What trial was that, friend?" Silvain smiled.

"The feast last night. It was the trial of temperance." The seneschal looked sympathy and hesitated. "She bade me say to you, a man is not sober who will not drink, nor pure who will not kiss, nor—sir, there was much more that I need not tell you. In fine, she condemns you because you would not be merry."

"Alas for me, I saw no reason," Silvain said. "And what is this trial to-day?"

"I am sworn not to tell," the seneschal said. "God give you fortune," of which he showed that he had little hope.

When they rode out from the castle the lady had Luca on one side and Antonio on the other, and both men were in spirits. It was plain that they had not failed in the trial of temperance. Silvain rode a horse's length behind them alone. She led up the narrowest, steepest valley to the mountains, and when the track was no more wide enough for three bade the two men go on before and called Silvain to ride with her.

"You have lost heart, sir?" she smiled.

"Why, no, Lady Helena. I have lost nothing."

"Then why do you wrap yourself in gloom?"

"I ask your pardon. I am not thinking of myself."

"Oh, you are pleased to be sorry for me! Here is a pretty pride. I condemn you and you are sorry I know no better. Dear sir, you must have a happy life. Whenever you fail someone else is to blame."

"I am sorry you know me no better," Silvain agreed, smiling. "That someone else thinks I fail is nothing to me. No one judges me but myself."

"And so you always win!" she laughed. "Oh, a happy life, Sir Silvain!"

"Who is your judge, Lady Helena?"

"Not you, sir."

"Your own heart. And are you happy?"

"I seek and do not find." She yawned. "Heigho, that is life. But you are content with yourself whatever befalls. That is death." She turned off over the pasture and set her horse to a gallop and the men thundered after her.

Over broken ground they went at a mad pace till she drew rein where a torrent fell roaring into deep pools of swift dark water that rushed away to leap down the hillside in another fall.

Helena slipped from her horse and climbed above the pools. "I love to watch the rainbows in the spray," she said. The men followed her. "See how they dance. Ah, my glove!" She had let it drop into the stream below. It was borne whirling away.

Antonio sprang after it. Luca ran down beside the stream. The little man struck out gallantly, but the rush of the water carried him by while the glove drifted into the eddies. Luca waded in and grasped it with a shout of triumph. Antonio was swept on towards the second fall.

Silvain made a running dive, came to him with the speed of the plunge, caught his hair and made the

farther side and clung to the rocks. They clambered out and up and crossing the torrent above came breathless and dripping back.

Luca was kissing the glove. "I pray you let me keep it," he said. "I will wear it on my helm."

"You have more to do yet," she took it from him, smiling.

"What trial is this, lady?" said Silvain coldly.

"It is the trial of courtesy," she said. "And you have failed again, Sir Silvain."

"By my faith, that is my blame, lady," Antonio said. "He might have saved the glove if he had not saved me."

"Every man for himself," Luca laughed.

"He made his choice," Helena said coldly. "He falls by it."

"You are hard, lady," Antonio sighed.

"I am what I am," she cried. "You are not here to change me."

She mounted again and rode on, Luca jovial at her elbow, and Antonio squeezed the water out of his bedraggled clothes and looked dolefully at Silvain and said, "We do the work and he takes the pay. I never liked cousin Luca. God give her joy of him."

"I will not say so, my lord. Forward, forward!"

"What has she for us now?" Antonio mourned.

They followed her up the slope, a steep climb on turf. She was making for a pass between two rocky hills, and when they came to the crest they looked down into a narrow valley the sides of which were almost sheer. At one end it was closed by cliffs down which a stream fell like a veil of lace. The floor of the valley was smooth green pasture, and from the cliffs it ran steeply down till the walls on either side were lower and clothed in trees, and it opened out and was lost in woodland.

On the crest Helena stopped a moment. "Do you trust your horses?" she laughed. "Have faith, my

lords, have faith." She led on by a cattle track which worked down into the valley through sharp zigzags.

"Facilis descensus Averni," Antonio complained. "Easy is the descent to hell: that is a poet's lie."

But he was more comfortable than Luca, heavier man on heavier horse, and a worse horseman, who flung himself from the saddle and stumbled on afoot cursing. Silvain came last, taking his time and looking far away down the valley.

She was first off the zigzags on to the level ground. She turned suddenly to rebuke Luca. "If a man will not trust his horse, whom will he trust? You lack faith, my lord."

"I trust him in what he is fit for," Luca growled as he mounted. "Not else."

"A good rule! I must learn it," she laughed.

"Is this a trial of faith, lady?" Antonio said eagerly.

"Why, have you not had trials enough?" she rode on.

"They drip yet," Luca chuckled at her side.

Down the valley they were riding two and two when from the woodland came a party of horsemen and charged on shouting, "Stand! stand!" They wore mail coats of dull black, they showed no other colour.

"Mother of God! Who are these?" said Luca, feeling for his sword.

"It is the riders of St. Barthélemy!" Helena cried. "Ah, the brigands!"

"Do they come so far?" Luca muttered. "This is the devil's luck. Turn and ride, lady." He pulled his horse round.

The black horsemen were spread across the valley. "It is she!" one shouted. "It is the Lady of Verrés. A prize, a prize!"

"Save me, my lords," Helena cried.

"Ride then, in God's name!" said Luca and caught at her horse.

"Stand off, you," one of the horsemen shouted. "She is meat for our master."

It was Silvain who took her bridle then, jostling Luca aside, and he set her horse going, not away from the black horsemen, but down the valley, charging upon them. "Forward, my lords, forward!" he shouted. "Ride close, knee to knee." He let Helena's bridle go. "Spur, lady, spur, at the gallop," and he drew his sword.

Luca ranged up alongside him. "Are you mad, Frenchman?"

"Not I. When I cannot run away I fight, my lord."

"You are a cowardly knave. We should have charged them while she rode off."

"Was it to charge them you turned your horse?" Silvain said. "That was the folly, my lord. Who can ride off up those cliffs? This is the way to safety. I pray you, do not flinch." He drove his horse on, calling over his shoulder, "Rein back behind me, lady," and ranged alongside Antonio so that the three men were abreast and the woman behind.

The black horsemen, still a single line, flinched from the clash and drew aside. The three broke through and the lady behind them and Silvain shouting, "Forward, forward!" drew aside and turned.

The black horsemen were gathering to pursue them. He rode upon the nearest, unhorsed a man with the sudden onset, beat down another, and made off again, snatching the bridle off the riderless horse as he went. So for a mile or more he made a rearguard through the forest while Luca and Antonio urged their lady on. The black horsemen followed for a while, howling threats and abuse at him, but they would venture nothing, and by ones and twos they dropped away and were lost among the trees.

"They give it up," said Luca. "They dare not come again." And laughing he made Helena a bow. "I declare you the victor, my queen. By St. Ours, you make

a gallant knight. That charge was nobly ridden. You should proclaim a tournament at Verrés and put on armour and challenge all the world to come against you. Would you run a course with her, Antonio?"

"She is an Amazon," Antonio smiled, "the queen of the Amazons, Penthesilea the bold who——"

"I am a woman, my lords," she said sharply. "I do not know what you are who will not fight for a woman."

Then Luca cried out, "By my faith, it was a coward's trick of the Frenchman to make you charge with us. But we brought you off, my queen. The devil knows what you would be now if we had left you to those wolves. God in heaven! We are not safe yet! Here are more rogues."

She laughed. "Have no fear, my lord. These are my own men. I see their colours."

It was the seneschal who came galloping to her. "Is all well, my lady?" he cried. "Where is Sir Silvain?"

"The Frenchman?" Luca laughed. "He has found fortune. He has picked up a horse to sell. Look where he comes, like a dealer to market." Silvain was jogging up to them leading his captured beast on a loose rein.

"You serve me well, Andrea," Helena said sharply. "Here are the riders of St. Barthélemy out on my land. Good watch you keep! If my father were alive he would not spare you, sir. I came near to fall into their hands. You grow old and weak, Andrea."

He bowed. "I thank you, my lady. The riders of St. Barthélemy! It is God's mercy that you are safe. This was a wild venture."

Silvain came up. "What trial was this, Lady Helena?" he said, smiling. "Another trial of faith?"

The seneschal looked at him curiously. "Here is one well pleased with himself!" the lady laughed. "God knows you have little reason, sir."

"By my honour," said Antonio. "I think none of us has better."

"Right, cousin!" Luca jeered. "The poor man comes back rich."

"It is true I have won a horse," said Silvain gently. "But what trial was this that you gave us, lady?"

"Do you mock me?" she cried. "Let it stand for a trial then. It was a trial of courage, Sir Silvain, and you have failed. You have all failed. Not one man of you all would fight for me. You bore me into the thick of the danger."

"St. Denis be my friend!" Silvain stared. "Did you not plan this venture to play with us?"

"Fool, should I bring the black riders down upon me?"

"They ride your horses, Lady Helena," Silvain said gently. "See, here is your cipher and your crest," he pointed to the bright metal on the led horse's bridle.

Antonio laughed quietly. "Here is a trial indeed, my lady." He saw her face white and angry. "But not of courage now."

He was drowned in Luca's roar. "Confess, confess, my queen. All is out now. They were your own men. I knew it and spared them." He turned on Silvain. "The devil take your dull head. You have spoilt the jest."

Helena put spurs to her horse and broke away. Luca went headlong after her, but she kept the lead.

Silvain rode up to the seneschal. "Sir, I struck down a man of yours. I pray you send him to me, for I would ask his pardon. And here is another man's charger," he gave up the bridle of the led horse.

"You come back to the castle, sir?" the seneschal said anxiously.

"Why, will you keep me out?"

"Not I. But I fear that my lady will not forgive you this."

Silvain laughed. "I do not leave a fight because it is lost," he said.

He was not kept out of the castle, but the lady did

not show herself again that day. "What have you done to her, my lord?" said Messire Thibaut. "She rode in as though the fiend was hunting her and she has shut herself up, and her women come out from her with red eyes, and the seneschal is to give you three lords your dinner apart."

"We are in disgrace, brother," Silvain smiled.

"She is angry with you, yet she will not send you away. All is well, lord," Thibaut rolled his eyes. "I have known many a woman."

In the dinner Silvain had no pleasure, for Antonio came to it moody and Luca insolent and quarrelsome, and the seneschal spoke only when he was roused from sombre meditations to keep the peace.

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST TRIAL

BUT in the morning they were summoned again to the room of pink marble, and found my lady smiling in a gown of green embroidered with flowers.

"Spring has come again," Antonio cried. "Here is Flora and her sunshine and all the earth is glad."

"Be glad, my lords, for you have come to the last of your trials," she said.

"Glad I am," Antonio said. "Yet I have some sorrow for those that must lose," and he bowed to Silvain and Luca and laughed.

"He must be talking. It is a little man's way," said Luca. "What is it now, my queen?"

"I have made trial of your manhood in temperance, in courtesy, and in courage——"

"And one has failed in all," Luca scowled at Silvain. "Is there another trial for him?"

"There is not one of you who has done well in all. You are as other men are, my lord Luca. You live to please yourself. Who of you knows what pleases me? That is the last trial. Tell me then, my lord Luca, what do I seek in a man?"

"In the man who is to be your husband, my queen?"

She laughed. "Is it my groom that you want to be?"

Luca knit his red brow and stared at her. "What do you seek in a man? What does a woman need of a man? Strength, strength, my queen, strength of hand and head. There is your answer."

"I thank you, my lord. What say you, my lord Antonio?"

Antonio went down on one knee and kissed her hand.

"Lady, what you seek in a man is worship. And indeed it is your right."

"You are graceful," she bent her head. "It is your turn, Sir Silvain."

"What you seek in a man you have not found. But such a man there is. He must be your master and your servant, Lady Helena."

She sat silent awhile. Then she turned to the seneschal behind her chair and held out her hand and took from him a golden box. She stood up and gave it to Luca. "My lord, I thank you for the honour you have done me."

He flushed. "What is this to mean?" He opened the box, saw a mirror, saw his own face.

"Alas, my lord, I can give you nothing better than what you would have given me—yourself. Fare you well."

He scowled at her. "Who wins then? Not one of these?"

She took from the seneschal a silver box. "Here is for you, Antonio. You have been gentle and kind."

The little man opened it and saw her portrait. "My lady!" he cried between delight and dismay.

"I would have you remember me, Antonio. But it is all I can give you."

Antonio looked at Silvain. "I dare not say you are wrong. Be happy, lady," he said, and kissed her hand again.

"Mother of God, is it he you choose?" Luca cried.

"Sir Silvain," she made him a curtsy, "what trial have you for me?"

"The French beggar!" Luca said. "What, will you eat dirt?"

Silvain came to him in a stride. "My lord, this is no place for what you and I must do," he said gently. "Lead on."

"You shall not fight him," she cried. "There is no honour in him."

But the two were gone. She turned fiercely to the seneschal. "Why do you stand there, Andrea? Go, take order with them. They shall not fight."

"I dare not stay them," the seneschal said. "Sir Silvain must fight for his honour and for yours."

"Who rules here?" she cried. "Get you gone."

The seneschal bowed and went out.

"Do not fear, Lady Helena," Antonio said. "He is no man to fail, your Silvain."

"Mine?" she flushed. "If he were mine he would do my will."

Antonio smiled. "That will he never. Be very happy, lady," he said and left her.

She ran to a window. Down in the courtyard his squire was buckling on Luca's armour. Silvain had only helmet and breastplate. Thibaut came with his horse and one of her own men brought from the armoury shield and lance. The seneschal took them and tried them and gave them to Silvain. "To your places, my lords," he cried.

The two men rode to opposite ends of the courtyard. Luca raised his vizor. "I fight at this Frenchman's challenge and among enemies," he shouted. "Let none come between him and me."

"I am warden of the lists, my lord," the seneschal cried. "Here is a fair field of honour. Make ready!" He waited a moment and gave the word.

The two knights charged. Silvain's lance was aimed at Luca's head, the hardest mark but the most deadly. Luca's point was set low to hit the shield. Before the shock came it fell lower, it met the shoulder of Silvain's horse, a stroke against the laws of arms. The horse was wounded deep, staggered and fell and brought Silvain crashing down.

Luca had let his lance go, he jerked his horse round on Silvain where he was held by the fallen struggling beast. Silvain flung himself prone and rolled away and

sprang to his feet without shield, and while Luca's horse was hampered by the struggles of the horse on the ground he ran in close on the horseman's near side. Before the sword arm could reach him he slashed at the man's leg and broke the stirrup leather and the girths, and as the horse plunged at the blow Luca and his saddle came down together. Silvain was upon him, Silvain struck the sword from his hand and bore him over on his back with a foot on his chest, with a sword point thrusting at his neck where helmet and breastplate met.

"I yield myself!" Luca gasped. "God in heaven, I yield."

"You have fought a foul fight. Take your life," Silvain said, and turned away."

"He is a vanquished man," the seneschal cried. "His arms and his horse are yours."

"I take nothing of his. Let his squire take them," said Silvain. He knelt by the fallen horse, now faint in death. "Forgive me, brother," he said gently. "You have died well."

The seneschal came to Luca. "Your horse and your arms are given to your squire, my lord," he said sharply. "See to it. You have my lord's leave to go. Go quickly. There is no room in Verrés for you and yours."

Luca scowled at him. "One dog teaches another to bark," he said. "You have learnt quick, Andrea. Will he teach you to bite? By my sword, you will have a merry life in Verrés." He turned away shouting for his squire and his page and his men and sprang on his unsaddled horse and spurred out.

Antonio's company were all ready too and the little man came to Silvain. "You have won who deserved to win. Guard her well, sir. And guard yourself," he said and he smiled. "For that is what you will not think of."

"By my faith," said Silvain, "it is of myself I think always. So do not you, my lord, who are the better man."

Antonio rode away and a little beyond the castle came upon Luca waiting for his men. "What, cousin, we are well out of that folly. Ride with me and we will be merry."

"Your way is not my way, my lord," said Antonio, and rode by and left him scowling.

In the courtyard the seneschal was saying to Silvain, "Why did you spare him, my lord? I would not have spared him."

"I would not be such as he is. Nor would you, sir."

"You are in no danger," the grave face smiled. "But I wish I could have fought him."

"That I saw," Silvain laughed. "Your lady is well served, sir."

The seneschal sighed.

Silvain was washing off the dust of my lord Luca when Thibaut came to him. "It is a long road that has no turning, as the hen said when her chickens were ducks." Messire Thibaut grimaced horribly. "Long life, my lord. For now it is worth living." He smacked his lips. "Here is God's plenty. A fair lady is she and of a noble spirit and wise. She has my leave to marry you. I do not grudge you to her. Good fare at Verrés!"

"Why, so it is," Silvain smiled. "This is a pleasant venture. But peace, brother, peace. You take what is not yours nor mine. The Lady Helena is her own." He sprang out of the bath and took Messire Thibaut by the ear. "Rogue, have you talked this folly broadcast?"

Thibaut howled. "Pity me! Why, lord, all the castle talks of it."

"Chattering magpies!" Silvain said. "Do not you talk of it, brother, or you shame me. Name of God, is my man to brag I have won a woman? Rogue!"

Thibaut chuckled. "Have no fear, lord. My tongue does not brag. When they tell me the lady is yours, I swear it is not so, for you are not the man to win any woman, you never looked on a woman to want her. And——"

Silvain bade him go to the devil.

A little while afterwards, Messire Thibaut, lurking by the kitchen, saw his master go up the lady's stair and chuckled again.

Helena lay on a couch in that room of pink marble and one of her women was reading to her love stories out of Ovid. At the sight of Silvain the woman was dismissed and fled, smiling.

Helena turned on her side. "When I bade you stay you left me," she said. "You come back without my leave."

"This is a cold welcome," Silvain smiled.

"You fought against my will."

"No will but mine rules me, Lady Helena."

"God knows what rules you!" she cried. "Why did you not kill the man? I would have killed him."

Silvain laughed. "So said your seneschal. You are fierce folk in Verrés."

"Andrea!" she smiled too. "Yes, Andrea thinks like a soldier. But what are you, Silvain?"

"Why, I thought you knew me. You have tried me and proved me."

"You want nothing," she said, and he saw a red glow in the dark of her eyes. "That is all your strength."

"I am the hungriest man alive," Silvain said. "I have sought honour and fortune all my days."

"And what have you won?"

Silvain laughed. "A dinted breastplate and a threadbare doublet. But my sword is bright, Lady Helena, and I have my pride."

"What are you proud of in this venture with me? That you have humbled me?"

"You are not humbled in my heart, Lady Helena.

Nor in your own, I think. You gave me challenge and we have fought our fight merrily. But there is no shame in a trial of arms."

"Why did you come to Verrés?"

"I came for my supper and my bed."

"And then you made believe you came for my love."

"I entered myself for your trials," Silvain corrected her.

"You had no right,"—she flushed—"unless you were in earnest."

"Lady, you gave challenge to all men. Well, I am a man. I took up your challenge."

She started up. "Am I not worth a man's love then?"

"You are a woman to win any man."

"Win a man! I thank you, I do not seek to win men. Let a man win me."

"It would be a noble venture," Silvain smiled.

"But not for Silvain!"

"I do my endeavour, Lady Helena," Silvain said gently.

"You do not prosper, by my faith!"

They stood against each other, eye to eye. The curtains at the doorway parted and in came the seneschal.

"What now? I did not call for you, Andrea?"

"No, lady," he smiled. "But I come at your father's order."

"My father?"

"So he said to me in the night he died: on his ring he made me swear to serve you, 'And when she has found a man to trust,' he said, 'give him the ring of Verrés and go your way.' Here is that ring, Sir Silvain." He held out a broad band of engraved gold on which four great rubies were set as a cross. "And now my service is done."

Silvain drew back. "You must serve her yet, Sir Andrea," he said. "I have no right to your ring."

"It is you she has chosen, my lord, and she has chosen well."

"My God, is that for you to say?" Helena cried. "You have heard him. He says I do not trust him. He is right." She swept out of the room.

"What have you done, my lord?" Andrea cried.

"No, what have you done?" Silvain said gently. "You are too hasty, sir."

"God forgive me, I meant to serve you both."

Silvain smiled. "That is what she cannot forgive," he said. "It does not satisfy her, my friend."

"Oh, sir, be patient."

Silvain laughed. "She would not thank you for that. But do not fear. I know well this is not the end of the venture."

The seneschal was still unhappy. It was plain that he feared Silvain might be hurt by the lady's disdain. He set himself to show the riches of the castle, to tell the tale of his lady's family and their glories. From the armoury to the muniment room they went, from the muniments to the treasury.

"It is a great thing to be seneschal of all this, Sir Andrea," Silvain said. "I feel like the Queen of Sheba when she saw the glories of Solomon—the half had not been told me," and he turned away to yawn.

"But the glory of Verrés is my lady Helena," said the seneschal loyally.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LADY'S CHOICE

THEY went to dinner and the lady did not appear.

"Sir Andrea, I fear we have made her angry," Silvain smiled.

"She has gone riding, sir. It is her way when she is troubled. She has gone out upon the hills."

"I hope she will not meet the riders of St. Barthélemy," Silvain smiled.

The seneschal changed the subject in a hurry.

But before the end of dinner he left his place and he came back looking uneasy. "Here is a strange thing, my lord. I thought my lady would be with her women. But none of them has seen her. She has not come back. She said nothing to them before she went. She is not used to be riding so long. I own I do not like it."

Silvain smiled. "And I—I remember the black horsemen of St. Barthélemy, my friend. Tell me, is this another trial of me?"

"No, by my faith, sir. This is no trick, I promise you."

"You do not know it at least," Silvain said gently. "I never thought so. She would not tell you. What if it is a trial of us both?"

The seneschal stared at him. "Oh, sir, this is no trial. Do not believe it. I fear she has fallen, or some ill has come to her."

"God forbid. But let us ride out and search the hills. She can but laugh at us. Will you lend me a horse, sir?"

While they were mounting in the courtyard Messire

Thibaut came to his master. "What is this hunt, my lord?"

"The lady is lost, brother," Silvain said softly. "Or she chooses to be lost."

Messire Thibaut made a grimace. "Or she has fallen among thieves."

"The black horsemen!" Silvain smiled.

Thibaut rolled his eyes. "Do you know the tale of the shepherd boy, lord? 'Wolf, wolf!' he cried when there was no wolf till no man believed the rogue. But the wolf came at last."

Silvain tossed back his hair and looked round the courtyard. A score of men and more were mustered. He sprang on his horse and rode to the seneschal's side. "Which way do you go, Sir Andrea?"

"No man marked where she went. We must scatter and search all the hills."

"Give your orders, sir. It grows late." The seneschal rode from man to man, and by twos and threes they clattered out and Silvain joined him again at the gate. "Which is the way to Biella, Sir Andrea? Is that a way she might go?"

The seneschal turned in the saddle. "You have said a shameful thing, sir. My lady would not seek that man."

"She would not. But my lord Luca is the man to take her if he found her. Would she ride on the road to Biella?"

"Holy Mother of God! She might go that way. It is a pleasant valley. She would not think of him nor fear him."

"That is our way then. Forward! Forward!"

They made up the eastern valley which climbs fast into the mountains. From the track by the river many a little path went up through the vineyards on either side to the pasture above. "She would not ride on this low road," the seneschal said. "My lady loves the heights. I have sent men up there."

"Luca would keep to the road," Silvain said. "Forward!"

He took the lead and pressed on, watching the track keenly and every path out of it. They had ridden an hour and the valley had vineyards no more, but was all pasture land with here and there a cluster of trees, when Silvain held up his hand and checked.

"Wait. Here have been horses halted," he said. "See how the turf is marked beside the track. They stopped by that copse, which gave them cover." He sprang down and walked about studying the ground. "They were not many, not more than a dozen, but a troop standing close and some time they stood. Then two or three climbed up above the track this way." He ran back to his horse. "This is how I read it: Luca had come so far when he saw the lady riding on the hill-side, he halted his men here to hide by the copse till she was past. Then he and another man or two climbed to cut her off. Up and after them, Sir Andrea."

Andrea stood in his stirrups. "Two of my men are up on the hill already. See, there they ride. Let us keep the track and push on."

"Push on then. I follow the scent." Silvain set his horse to the slope, and choosing the easiest way saw hoof-marks before him. By the time he had reached the shoulder of the hill, the two men-at-arms came up with him. "Is the best going here?"

"Here or nowhere, my lord. It is all broken above."

Silvain turned his horse and rode along the hill-side, watching the ground. The grass was rich enough to show tracks and others had been before them. He looked ahead, and dashed on. They caught him up when he had flung himself from the saddle at a place where the grass was trampled down for yards. He had a strip of cloth in his hand, he was picking up another, blue cloth torn with rough edges. "Do you know that, my children?" he cried.

"It might be my lady's cloak. She rides often in a cloak of blue."

Silvain put his hand to his mouth and shouted, "Sir Andrea! Sir Andrea!"

Down in the valley Andrea lifted his hand and turned his horse up the slope. Away on the hill on the other side the men-at-arms searching there heard the shout and halted. The men by Silvain waved to them and they plunged down to cross the valley.

"My lady's cloak," Silvain said, "and here has been rough work. She was caught. Her cloak was torn in strips. To bind her on her horse, I think. There is no blood. And then"—he cast about like a hound and threw up his head and looked far: "Where lies Biella, my children? There to the east? Which is the quickest way?"

"The valley road is easiest, my lord. But a man can strike over the hills."

"These men did, I think. Or some of them. Forward then, in God's name." He shouted down the hillside, "Biella, Andrea. Follow, follow," and he mounted again and galloped on with his two men.

They could not long hold that pace. Climbing higher, they came upon broken ground. "Here are no more tracks, my lord," said the man at his elbow.

"Only a hound could follow their line through this stuff. Take the shortest line, children. That will find them. Forward, forward! They have had your lady too long."

You see a long string of horsemen on those hills, first Silvain and his two, then, some way behind, Andrea the seneschal, and far beyond him two men more, all of them making their best pace, but since they were cutting across the valleys with much up and down work they were often out of sight of each other. The men with Silvain knew their ground and led him well, finding a way round ravines and hitting off easy slopes amidst

forest and crag. But the day was going and the shadows lay long and dark.

"How far now to Biella, my children?"

"It will be night before we come to Biella, and the horses will be spent."

"So will my lord Luca's horses then," Silvain said slowly. "If we miss him on the way we should be there to meet him. We go faster than he who has a helpless woman to carry. But he may think of that too. What is he thinking, I wonder. Would he know this way over the hills as well as you?"

"Luca of Biella is a great hunter. He knows the hills. He will strike straight for his castle. God help us, my lord, we must catch him before he is there or my lady is lost."

Silvain did not answer that. "A great hunter?" he repeated. "Now he is hunted." He tossed back his hair and looked far. "A hunted beast does not run straight."

They were on high ground riding round the head of a steep cleft. He checked and looked down. "Forward, my lord, that is not our way," the men called to him. "We can press on here, we need not go down for two miles yet." He galloped after them.

But in a little while another valley opened out and again he checked. It began in crag but in its depths the shadows lay upon woodland. "What now, my lord?" the men called to him. Silvain held up his hand and they too halted. Something was moving among the trees. While they watched, a herd of deer broke out and fled up the hill-side. "If we waste time we lose him," the men fumed. "Ride on, my lord, that is not our way."

"Why did those deer break cover?" Silvain said. "Look!" In the shadows of the wood he saw movement, light colours. He turned his horse and made off down the hill-side.

The men-at-arms hesitated. "There is something there, by St. Ambrose. Horses, yes, horses. What the devil should Luca do there?" Both talked at once. "He is gone into hiding while he sends to fetch his men from Biella. Holy saints, he may have had a troop here to meet him. Charge then, brother, charge, for shame. The Frenchman is gone alone." They thundered on after Silvain.

Silvain broke into the woodland and saw dim shapes riding fast through the trees. He made out Luca in his armour leading the horse on which Helena swayed, and those two were first of a line that turned and gathered to meet him. He swerved away and rode hard, stooping to his horse's head under the branches and so swept round to cut off Luca, his men-at-arms following close. Their charge broke upon Luca and Helena. Silvain drove his horse between the two, and though the horse was flung back from the shock, Helena's bridle was torn from Luca's hand and her horse staggered aside. His men-at-arms were hewing at Luca. He thrust into the fight crying, "Away with you, carry your lady to Sir Andrea. She is your care."

They drew off, they took the lady between them and rode away with her. And upon Silvain broke the troop of Luca's men.

"Cut him down, lads," Luca roared, "cut him down. He is but one."

Helena was hurried on out of the wood and up the hill-side, helpless and dumb, for she was lashed to the saddle, her arms were bound to her sides, a strip of cloth was tied across her mouth to gag her.

The seneschal saw her as he came charging down and cried out, "My lady, my lady Helena! God be praised!" He brought his horse to a stand. "Are you hurt then? Speak, for the love of God." He saw why she did not speak and rode to her side and with his dagger cut away the gag and her bonds.

She slid from the saddle, she would have fallen but he was down and caught her in his arms. "Andrea! Good Andrea," she said and cried.

"My lady, my dear noble lady," Andrea said and kissed her cold hands.

"Oh, Andrea, thank God for you. Take me away. Take me home," she sobbed.

"Mount then," he said gently. "I will hold you safe. But be strong yet. There is far to go. Ride on with her, good lads."

"Andrea!" She clung to him. "You must not leave me."

"I must not linger with you. Sir Silvain is fighting there alone." He mounted again.

"Let him fight. Send your men in to him. Your place is with me, Andrea. Put me on my horse and let us go."

"I dare not for your honour."

"God in heaven, I bid you," she said fiercely. "Andrea!" But he galloped away to the wood and she stamped her foot and cried.

"Pray you mount, my lady," one of the men-at-arms said. "We must ride on."

"Oh, be silent, fool," she sobbed.

"It was Sir Andrea's order, my lady."

"His order!" she laughed. "Yes, do his will. Ride on. Ride away."

And now the other two men were coming up and called as they came. "What now? What is to do?"

"They are fighting there in the wood."

"Then what the devil are you doing?" was the answer, and the two charged on.

The men beside her looked at each other. "By St. Ambrose, he is in the right," said one. "We do nothing here. Come on, brother."

"By your leave, my lady." They made off after their comrades.

"By my leave!" said the lady miserably.

When Luca's men came upon him Silvain spurred at them and cut through. It was easy, for they came scattered among the trees, but he did not choose to push on lest they should abandon him and go after the lady. So he turned short and dashed in, cut a man down and tried again to break away. But that was not so easy. Luca was roaring to them to close, and hold him and cut him down and he had men upon him to right and left and Luca, armoured from head to heel, barring his way, hewed at him with heavy strokes.

He made his horse rear and plunge, he cleared some space on either side and reined back. They came at him again, he could hardly guard his head, he was breathless and failing when the seneschal charged into the fight. The shock flung Luca and his men one upon another and in their struggling confusion two went down. But the seneschal was in the midst of them beset on all sides. Silvain came again and fought into the press and joined him on his left hand but not soon enough. Luca had struck at his head and though he took the blow on his sword it glanced to his helmet and his shoulder and he fell backwards.

"Down with the Frenchman now, down with him, and all is won," Luca was roaring as he struck.

"No, my lord," said Silvain, "all is lost." For that smashing blow had left Luca bowed forward unguarded and Silvain rose in his stirrups and cut down at his neck. The blow came between helmet and backplate and cut deep and Luca lay lolling upon his horse's head a moment and rolled down among the trampling hoofs.

"Your lord is down and dead," Silvain cried. "Yield you now."

"You shall go down with him, Frenchman," one shouted, and they pressed him hard till the four men-at-arms charged upon them together and delivered him and swept them away.

Silvain sprang down. "Well done, Sir Andrea," he cried. "You have the honour of that fight."

The seneschal was leaning against a tree binding a wound in his arm. He laughed. "I—I have my head, which I did not think," he said unsteadily.

Silvain came to him: "What hurt?"

"None. None. This is nothing but a little blood. Only my head sings yet. He had a heavy hand, the lord Luca."

"He had a heavy conscience, God pardon him," Silvain said.

Out of the shadow a little voice cried, "Andrea! Oh, Andrea, where are you? Andrea! I am afraid."

Andrea started forward. "My lady! This is a wicked folly. You should have been far off homeward. I bade you ride away. Why do you come back here? To look at death?"

Silvain laughed gently.

Helena ran up and cast herself into Andrea's arms. "Andrea! Do not be angry! How could I go? I was afraid. Oh, Andrea! You are hurt, you are wounded. This is blood!"

"It is nothing. Let it be."

"Be still, be still." She felt about his arm, where the unbound bandage flapped open again. She laid bare the wound and kissed it and took her kerchief and bound it up. "So, so. Ah, Andrea, forgive me."

"For what, lady Helena?"

"For all, my lord."

"A master and a servant, that is what she seeks in a man, Sir Andrea," Silvain said. "You have stood your trial and have won. The lady Helena has found a man she can trust. Put on the ring of Verrés, Sir Andrea, it is yours. She has chosen well, by my faith. Live long and happy."

He sprang on his horse and rode away singing.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BABES IN THE WOOD

SILVAIN was thriving. He had a breastplate engraved with gold, he had a spare horse—these things gifts of a grateful bride—and Thibaut his squire wore new breeches—these from the bridegroom. Thibaut and he sat by the stream and dined on a venison pasty.

A troop of horsemen clattered up. Their leader looked hard and halted and said, "My God, you take your ease! Who are you?" He was a short fellow, very wide, with a red, hairless face and a shock of hair much the same red.

"A knight of France, sir. Silvain de St. Lo. Are you the lord of this land?"

"What if I am?"

"Peace be with you," said Silvain mildly. "It is good land. I pray you lend me enough to sit upon."

The man laughed. "You are a peaceful man. I know your fame, Sir Silvain."

"Alas, sir, I do not know yours."

The man dismounted. "I am Bernabo the Red, the captain of the Count of Novara."

"A proud office," said Silvain, "worthy of a good soldier." He reached for the bottle of wine which stood cooling in the stream and passed it to Bernabo.

"To-day to you, to-morrow to me," Bernabo drank. "By the holy rock, they need a soldier in Novara as things go now, and Count Camillo is none," he chuckled. "A gentle lord, he. With that wolf El Moro master in Milan someone must keep watch. But a dog's life.

Here am I in the saddle dawn till dusk beating the marches while the cursed townsfolk grow fat and rich. No feast days for old Bernabo! What brings you to Novara, Sir Silvain, you man of peace?"

"Sir, I ride to win honour."

"Then you have come the wrong road. No honour for soldiers here. My lord the Count, he is a dreamer, he has no head nor hand for arms. And the Mayor and his greasy townsmen—they grumble that we live upon them, they bar their houses against us, they hate a man of the sword as the devil hates holy water." He laughed. "Fatted calves they are in Novara." He looked at Silvain and the little eyes in the broad red face twinkled. "And you ride to win honour! So did I once. That was a hundred years ago. Ride on, Sir Silvain."

"God send us both noble ventures, sir."

"Amen. So be it. I will go look for mine." He swung on his horse and jingled away with his troop.

"There goes a happy man," said Thibaut. "He would think he was ill used if they made him Emperor." And they finished their pasty and their wine, and in spite of Bernabo rode on towards Novara.

They had gone a mile or two, they were coming into groves of walnut and chestnut when they saw men on horseback who seemed to want to climb trees. From one tree to another these men rode, peered up into the branches and went on to try again.

"What sport is this?" said Thibaut. "Are they hunting squirrels?"

Silvain tossed back his fair hair and looked through the chequers of sunlight and shadow. "They *have* hunted men," he said. "One lies stricken there." Then he shouted: "Who are you that come killing? Stand and answer for it." He put on his helmet and galloped at them.

"Pity me," Thibaut groaned. "They be four—five —six!" He halted, set his hand to his mouth and made

a noise like a horn and shouted, "Forward, lads, forward!"

Whether this call to an imaginary troop deceived the men in the wood or the sight of Silvain charging in his steel was enough for them, they made off, scattering among the trees. Some way Silvain chased them, but they knew the woodland and he lost them soon.

Messire Thibaut, who had his led horse to manage, came on warily, looking all ways, and halted by the man on the ground. "How is it with you?" he said. The man grasped a broken sword, he wore no armour, his doublet was red with wounds, his face set in agony. "You died hard, brother," Thibaut muttered. "God give you peace."

Silvain came back angry. "Cowardly knaves these," he cried and put up his vizor and looked down at the dead man. "Here is foul work! This was no fight, but a murder. He had no armour upon him and they were six."

Thibaut looked about him and shivered. "Only six, lord?" he said.

"You saw the rogues."

"God knows what I saw. I thought I saw them setting their horses to go up trees. Pity me, am I mad, lord, or they?" He gave a scream. "Look, look! Did he ride three beasts, this dead man?"

In a glade hard by a horse was wandering and behind him two ponies all saddled and bridled

Silvain looked at the ponies and looked up into the trees. "You are safe now," he shouted. "The villains are gone. You are saved."

Thibaut rolled his eyes. "Pray for poor me! Who is saved, lord?"

"Those who rode the ponies, brother," Silvain said, and he dismounted and bent over the dead man and closed his frightened eyes and covered his face with a fern leaf. Then he walked to the ponies and slipped their bridles over his arm and looking up again into the

trees he called, "Come down, come down, and I will bring you safe home."

High up among the boughs the leaves rustled. White faces looked out. He saw a boy and a girl. "Sir, who sent you? Who are you?" the boy called.

"I am a knight from France, sir, Silvain de St. Lo. I ride through the world to serve those who need. And so I am here to serve you."

"What have they done to my father?"

"Sir, I think your father is in heaven. But you have your life to live. Come down and I will bring you home and guard you faithfully."

Then the girl cried out: "Sir, have those wicked men gone?"

"They have gone, lady. They are afraid," Silvain said. "Do not fear them."

The boy dropped from bough to bough, helping his sister, till they were close over Silvain's head, and he caught them and swung them to the ground.

The boy was flushed and fierce at this indignity. "I thank you, I thank you. Let us be."

"Sir, I ask your pardon. I am to blame," said Silvain gravely. "Will it please you to mount and ride?" The boy took the girl's pony from him, but she looked at Silvain and let him put her in the saddle.

"Wait, Barbara," the boy commanded. "Sir, where is my father?"

"His body lies there, sir. But he is with God."

The boy looked. The girl hid her face and sobbed.

Silvain took the dead man's horse and Thibaut and he lifted the body and bound it on the saddle as they could.

"Hush, Barbara, hush," the boy whispered. "Oh, do not cry!" For he was crying too.

Thibaut made strange grimaces. "Alas, the poor babes in the wood!" he groaned and wiped his eyes on his sleeve.

The boy climbed on his pony. "Come, Barbara," he muttered. The two children rode away.

Silvain left the two led horses to Thibaut and came up beside the girl. "Where is your home, lady?" he said gently. The little drawn face looked at him with fear.

"Sir, you will bring us to Novara," the boy tried to give his order like a man. "My father is the Count of Novara."

Silvain made him a salute. "I shall do your will, my lord. I pray you, did you ride out alone with your father?"

"Yes, we rode alone. My father has many servants and soldiers too. But it is better to ride alone. You can see the birds and the flowers. He often rides out with us."

"Oh, Gian!" the girl sobbed. "He will not ride any more."

"Who waits for you now in Novara, my lady?" said Silvain quickly.

She stared at him. She seemed not to understand. The boy stared too. "There are all the people in the castle," he answered. "There is my uncle."

Silvain heard a groan from behind. "Fatherless, motherless!" Thibaut mumbled. "God pity you."

"I will guard you," Silvain said. "And you will have many to love you."

The girl swayed in the saddle and he put an arm about her.

"Barbara!" the boy rebuked her, but she leaned into the strength of the arm. He drew himself up and rode gallantly, his face working beneath tears.

So they came at last in sight of the grey walls of Novara. They were riding down by a wide stream that sparkled in swift music when they surprised a man painting. He was at careful work putting flowers into the foreground of a picture of a woman and a shepherd. He did not see them till he heard their horses. He

turned with a frown which passed into laughing amazement. "Holy Venus!" he cried. "And who is the gallant knight that has won your fair body, my Barbara?"

"We have no heart to be merry, my lord," Silvain frowned. "I am Silvain de St. Lo. I have ill news for Novara."

"Uncle Stefano, my father is dead," the boy cried.

"Dead? Good angels guard you, Gian! What wicked chance is this?"

"We are bringing him. He is there on the horse."

Stefano ran to the body and saw the blood. "Dead! He was killed by the sword. Camillo, my brother!" He turned upon Gian and cried. "Tell me, boy, who fought with him? How did he die?"

"We were in the wood. We were looking for birds' nests, and Barbara and I were up in the trees and my father was walking telling us where to climb. And then men rode at him and killed him."

"What men were they?"

"I do not know. They rode at him and he fought. Oh, he fought bravely, uncle. But they beat him and he is dead."

"He fought against odds. His sword was broken before he died," Silvain said. "God send us all so good a death."

Stefano scowled at him. "And you, sir, you let him die."

"I came too late. He was down before I saw the fight. Then my squire and I charged upon these knaves and they scattered and fled. So I bring his children safe."

"What men were they?"

"Alas, my lord, if you do not know your brother's enemies, how should I? They wore black armour, they would murder a naked man, but they would not stand to fight, they knew that wood well enough and some were but lads. Judge who they might be. I cannot tell."

Stefano looked at him with suspicion. "My brother had no enemies in his own land. But there are enemies abroad. This is a strange, dark story."

"There are those who suffer while we talk, sir," Silvain said coldly. "Ride on, my lord Gian." Their sad procession moved away.

Stefano shouted to his servant, who was gaping and listening in the background, and his horse was brought him and he galloped on ahead.

When Silvain and the children came to the town, the gates stood open and a crowd was gathering in the streets. They rode by men who bared their heads but shook their fists at heaven, and women who wept and cried out curses and prayers. Gian went on and took the lead, saluting his people in the careful formality of a child, looking before him with wan set face. But Barbara shrank into Silvain's arm and trembled.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COUNCIL OF NOVARA

AT the gate of the castle Stefano was waiting, and with him a big man flushed and breathless who wore a robe and chain of civic office askew. They made a solemn salute to the dead body and trumpets wailed as it came into the courtyard. There a troop of servants surrounded it to bear it away in state.

Stefano hurried to Silvain. "Now, sir, come in. Let us hear all that you can tell."

"Let us care for the children first, my lord," Silvain dismounted and lifted Barbara down. "Where are your women, my lady?" She held his hand tight.

"The children saw it. We must hear them," said the man in the gown.

"Surely. Come, Gian," Stefano took the boy's arm and Barbara's. "Come, my dear, be brave."

"What, must we still be talking?" Silvain said.

"Sir, my brother's blood cries from the ground."

"And so we are to talk!" Silvain laughed.

"Here is our lord murdered," growled the man in the gown. "How was it, sir? That you shall tell us, by St. Anthony."

They came into a council chamber hung with scarlet and gold. Stefano took the place at the head of the table, the man in the gown sat on his right hand. It was Silvain who put Gian into a chair. Then he sat himself down and took Barbara on his knee.

"Now, my lord, who is this knight?" the man in the gown began.

"And who is your courteous friend, my lord?" said Silvain.

"Peace, peace, let me speak," Stefano cried. "This is the Mayor of Novara, Sir Silvain. Sir Silvain is a French knight, Paolo."

Silvain bowed. The Mayor grunted. "You do not know me, nor I you. Come, sir, how was my lord murdered?"

The door opened and there came in a man in a bishop's purple cassock. "Stefano, my son," he cried, "is this true that they tell me? Your brother——" He saw the children and stopped.

"My brother is murdered, my lord. We——"

The Bishop held up his hand. He came to the children, he put his hands on their heads. "Oh, my little ones, my little ones. God comfort your hearts," he said and blessed them. And then he turned to Stefano. "What is this? Why do you trouble them?" he said.

"They saw the murder, my lord. We wait to hear how it was done. Speak out, Gian. Tell your tale."

So Gian told it all over again, while the Bishop covered his face with his hands.

Then Silvain struck in quickly: "As I rode on my way I saw these horsemen hunting in the trees and a man lying dead. I charged on them and they would not stand to meet me. They scattered and were gone. Then I rode back and found the children and brought them home. Now all is told. And for the love of God let these babes have done with it and rest."

The Mayor turned to the child. "Is this true that he says, my lord Gian?"

"Of course it is true," Gian cried.

"Give thanks to God that he was there, Paolo," the Bishop said sternly. "Sir Silvain, you have done like a gallant knight. It is by your work that these babes are saved."

"It was my good fortune I was there, my lord. And now they have borne enough. I pray you trouble them no more."

"We have troubled them too much," said the Bishop

and looked at Stefano, and servants were called to take the little people away. But Barbara clung to Silvain and would not go till he promised that she should see him again.

"So you have come to stay in Novara," the Mayor growled.

"I stay if the child has need of me."

"She will have need of men who are true and kind, Paolo," the Bishop said gravely. "We have more enemies than we know."

"Who are your enemies? Who are the enemies of your lord Camillo?" Silvain cried. "I have asked that already," and he looked at Stefano.

"You ask!" the Mayor cried. "By the holy rock, you are the only one who has seen them."

"Men in black armour. Men who had no stomach to fight. Men who knew your country well. Young men. That is all I can say of them. Judge who they might be."

"I thought that my lord Camillo had no enemies in all the world," said the Bishop sadly.

"Not in Novara, my lord," Stefano answered. "No, not one. But what of Milan? Lodovico El Moro is hungry for Novara and he is the very man for such a deed as this."

"It is a far cry to Milan," the Mayor looked sideways at Stefano. "Is not the frontier watched, my lord? Where is Bernabo? By the holy rock, how is it we hear nothing of Bernabo and his guards? There are enough of them and, holy saints, they cost enough. And here is our lord murdered on his own land."

"Bernabo rode out on his patrol this morning," Stefano said. "He takes his orders from my brother, Paolo. How can I tell where he is?"

"Or where he was," the Mayor growled. "Where was he when this murder was done? That is what we townsfolk shall ask, my lord."

"I met your captain Bernabo on the road at noon,"

Silvain said. "He was an hour's ride away from the wood. He went on to watch the frontier, so he said."

"So he said," the Mayor sneered. "Who knows what he did? He was near enough. That we know."

Stefano cried out: "For shame, Paolo. Bernabo is true as steel. I will not hear this."

"You will not hear it, my lord? You will have more to hear, I promise you."

"Peace, my son, peace," the Bishop tried to check him.

"Here is no peace, I say. Our lord is murdered. And his brother tells us he had no enemies. Do you know what I ask? I ask if he had enemies in his own house?"

"Oh, be silent," the Bishop cried. "You speak in the house of death."

"Aye, so I do. And for the dead man I speak. Do you know what they say in the town, my lord Stefano? They ask, who is lord in Novara now? They ask, who gains by your brother's murder?"

"By all the saints of God, no man gains or shall gain." Stefano cried. "Gian is Count of Novara now, and I will guard him and his with my life."

"If it is so, it is well," the Mayor growled.

"You are answered, Paolo," the Bishop said. "Oh, my son, pray for a mind that thinks no evil of men."

And then Bernabo came blustering in. He set down his helmet on the table with a clatter, he flung himself into a chair, he mopped his bald red brow. "Well, what do you know about it?" he said. "How the devil was it?"

The Mayor laughed. "A good jest, by St. Anthony! The Count is murdered and the captain of the Count's guard comes to ask how it was done! Where were you, captain? Where were your men?"

"Our good Paolo is pleased to think you had a hand in the murder, Bernabo," Stefano said.

Bernabo banged his hand on the table. Bernabo

started to his feet swearing. "The devil burn you," he roared. "You lie in your greasy throat. If he had ridden with me, he would be with us now. By the holy rock, I warned him it was folly, this fancy of his to ride out alone. Did I not, my lord Stefano?"

"I have heard you," Stefano said. "You warned him often the Milanese were dangerous."

"God help him, he knows it now," Bernabo cried. "I served him faithfully. Fires of hell! That is nothing to boast of. He was a good master. Tell me, you dog, why should I betray him? He had me in honour and upheld me against you and your miserly town."

"You will not bully me, captain," the Mayor growled. "I tell you this. You were near, you and your men, when my lord was murdered. The Frenchman saw you."

Bernabo turned furious on Silvain. "You are in it, are you? What have you said of me?"

"I said that I met you an hour's ride from the wood. I said that you rode on to the frontier. This also I say. It is not possible you or your men were near the wood when Count Camillo was murdered."

"Fair witness, by heaven. I thank you. There is your answer, master Mayor."

"I do not know your witness," the Mayor said. "I know you."

"For shame, Paolo, for shame," the Bishop cried. "Oh, my son, we are not here to think evil of each other, but to take council for fatherless children and this poor town."

"The town is well enough," the Mayor growled, "and the town will guard its children."

"Guard nothing!" Bernabo swore at him. "Go mind your shop."

"Novara is my care," said Stefano with dignity. "I will maintain it against all enemies. Have no fear, Paolo. If the Milanese strike they will find us ready."

"A fig for the Milanese," quoth the Mayor.

"Ready, by the holy rock!" Bernabo laughed. "And eager for them," and Stefano smiled.

"Well," the Mayor looked from one to the other, "I will wait for them." And he got on his feet to go, and the others rose too.

"I pray you, have you done?" Silvain cried. "This is the strangest council ever I heard. Here is your lord murdered and you talk of anything but hunting the murderers."

"Burn my soul," quoth Bernabo, "what can we do? The knaves are fifty miles away by now. I never heard of the murder till I came into the town."

"To sit and talk about it!" Silvain shrugged.

"Why, what can I do? I say. All my horses are weary and it grows dark."

The Bishop sighed. "You are a soldier, Sir Silvain, and I am not. What would you have us do?"

"Why, my lord, scour the country with every man you can mount."

"And so we shall to-morrow," Stefano cried. "Be sure, sir, I will spare nothing to hunt them down."

"Oh, to-morrow and to-morrow!" Silvain laughed.

"The devil defend me, what can we do in the dark?" Bernabo grumbled, looking at Stefano, and Stefano shook his head.

"Will you stay in Novara, Sir Silvain?" the Bishop said anxiously.

"If you have need of me, my lord."

"I think my lady Barbara asked you to stay. It may be that we are in danger. We have enemies whom we do not know. Stay, sir, and watch over these children."

"So be it, my lord," Silvain bowed.

"By the holy rock, I am captain of the guard of the Count of Novara," cried Bernabo. "I want no Frenchman to do my work."

"You will have work enough, my son. The town stands in danger if this blow comes from Milan." The Bishop turned to Stefano. "My lord, the children are

your treasure to guard, and here is a gallant knight God's hand has sent you. Let us give thanks in our need."

"Give thanks?" the Mayor growled. "What was he sent for? To see the murder done!"

But Stefano turned to Silvain all smiles. "Sir, you honour us. I am proud that Silvain de St. Lo should take service in Novara. And I confess my heart is lighter now that a knight of renown has the children in guard. For I shall have many cares and we must needs be often afield, Bernabo and I. Who knows what villainy is planned against us? Gian is the last hope of my house. The rogue in Milan who murdered his father has no mind the son should live. But you will not fail, I think."

"Sir, I will do my endeavour," Silvain said.

"Oh, if you have a mind to be nurse, give you joy," cried Bernabo.

Then Silvain was taken to the children, and found Barbara declining to go to bed until she had seen him. They lived in a tower of their own from which a passage in the wall led to the great chambers of state. Stefano offered Silvain lodging there beside his own, but Silvain chose a little room in the tower opening out of the children's, where a servant was wont to sleep, and Stefano, protesting that all the castle was at his choice and the best lodging in it none too good, let him have his way.

To that little room Messire Thibaut came and elevated his nose. "If this is for you, what rat's hole is there for me?" he complained.

"This is for both, brother."

"They call you to supper, lord. But you must not go. For if you swell, here is no room for you."

"I will go and you shall stay, brother," Silvain smiled. Thibaut groaned and his eyes goggled. "And when I have eaten, you may go eat. We keep watch and watch."

One of Thibaut's eyebrows went up to his hair, the

other twisted down. "They say in the castle the murderers were sent by the Duke of Milan," he said and grinned.

"I have heard it. I have heard many things, brother. I think I believe none."

Thibaut sucked his teeth. "The man who paints—the pretty lord Stefano—now his brother is dead he has all in his hands. It is very fortunate for the lord Stefano."

"Oh, brother, trust no one but believe nothing. Stefano and Bernabo, Bishop and Mayor, not one of them trusts another, yet some of them must be honest, and all may be. But who murdered the father left his work half done."

"What I do not believe is what every one tells me," said Thibaut. "Those men in the wood were no foreigners. Milanese? Fie!"

"I have heard something too much of Milan," Silvain agreed. "Watch, brother, watch well."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BEAR PIT AND THE BEDROOM

IN this temper they took charge of the children. But the task was not difficult. The servants indeed were frightened and excited by the murder of the Count and life in the castle did not run smoothly. But there seemed to be no guile in them. They were, said Messire Thibaut justly, like a yard of hens when a fox had snapped up their cock. They embarrassed Silvain by their worship of him. That a knight of fame and a knight who was young and good to look at should be the governor of the children delighted their fancy. They felt themselves living in the midst of wonderful dangers and made him their hero.

Stefano gave no reason for suspicion. He came to see the children every morning, he was busy all day with the affairs of the little state, mustering and training the town guard, sending out companies to the frontier posts. He was perfectly the good regent. And day by day Bernabo rode out with his men-at-arms scouring the country, seeking news of the murderers. He brought back only stories and guesses, but it seemed to Silvain that he was zealous in his quest. At least he and his company did only what honest men should do.

And the children—"It is not you who watch these babes, my lord," said Thibaut. "It is they who watch you." There was no trouble to keep them in hand. Barbara gave her heart to Silvain, and Gian, who was more silent, who had more pride, wanted always to be with him. They would not go to the falconry or the kennels, they would not feed the bears in the pit, they

would not cross the courtyard unless he came too. There was no fear of their being caught alone.

So the days went by while the dead Count lay in state in the castle chapel and the pomp of his funeral was made ready.

But Silvain was not at ease. The very quiet proved to his judgment that it was not from Milan the murderers came. If the Duke of Milan had ordered the murder, he would have marched to take Novara as soon as its Count was dead. What reason for waiting till the town was ready to defend itself? Not in Milan, not anywhere abroad, but in Novara the murder was planned. There must be another blow to come.

One night after he had eaten supper with Stefano, as was their wont, and was going back to his tower he found a crowd in the dark courtyard, Bernabo's men and servants gossiping loud. There was laughing and horseplay. Silvain passed through the midst and those who saw him made way civilly enough. "It is Sir Silvain, fie, fie, it is Sir Silvain." But some were too merry to see or hear. He held a man off, another stumbled against him, the crowd swayed and jostled. He found himself on the edge of the bear pit. A man tumbled upon him. He slid aside. There was a crash, a yell and scuffling in the gloom below.

"He is down, he is down!" someone shouted. "The bears are on him."

"Who is down? Who is it?"

"The Frenchman, by my soul!" someone roared and someone laughed.

"Sir Silvain! Sir Silvain is fallen into the pit! O God, help us!" The crowd surged and scattered.

"Not all of one mind, brothers?" Silvain said to himself and then he shouted, "Bring lanterns and a ladder!" and moved as he spoke, drawing aloof.

His voice was not known, or not known well enough, for anyone (save the man who had fallen into the pit) to be sure what had happened. There was much run-

ning to and fro. Silvain kept back against the wall watching and listening. Lanterns came at last and he saw a cluster of Bernabo's men about the pit. Bernabo himself waddled out of the guard-room roaring, "What the devil is all the din?" He cuffed a servant. "Why do you brawl here?"

"Sir Silvain has fallen into the bear pit, captain."

"The devil he has! There is a fool's trick now! That was not what he came for. What a world, what a world!" Bernabo waddled on towards the pit.

Some of the servants were on the edge with lanterns, but it was hard to make out what lay in the depths. A sound of growling and moaning came up from the dark mingled with the soft footfall of the prowling beasts. The servants had a ladder and were arguing who should go down, with eyes on Bernabo's men-at-arms. But those heroes showed no interest.

"Where is he, my lads?" Bernabo said.

"There he lies in the corner. They have clawed him, captain."

"God rest his soul!" Bernabo cried. "Here is an end for a gallant knight!"

Silvain stole up behind, Silvain clapped his hand on Bernabo's shoulder. "Why, captain, you will not leave the poor lad to die there?" he said.

Bernabo turned heavily, gripped him, peered at him, made noises in his throat and said: "God and His angels be praised, you are safe. Here is Sir Silvain, fools. Why the devil did you say he had gone down?"

"Not the Frenchman?" the men spoke together. "Who was it then? Who has gone?" they began to number themselves. "Where is Giacomo?"

"What does it matter who he is?" Silvain cried. "You have to save him." But no man moved. "Why, if you dare not lead, then follow in the name of God."

He ran to the ladder and snatched a lantern and began to climb down. Bernabo stood a moment, then swearing at his men, waddled after. The bears shrank

away from the light growling. Silvain sprang down and caught up the fallen man on his shoulder and made for the ladder again. One of the beasts shambled after him, he stepped aside and dashed the lantern in its face. The ladder was creaking under Bernabo's weight. "Up with you," Silvain cried and threw his lantern away and drew his sword. He halted a moment by the foot of the ladder, struck at the muzzle of the angry beast that came at him again, checked it and climbed fast on Bernabo's heels.

At the top Bernabo turned and looked at him eye to eye. "By the holy rock, you are bold," Bernabo muttered.

"Here is your man, sir," Silvain said and thrust into his arms the bleeding senseless body. "God send him better fortune."

And so at last he came to the children and dismissed the hungry Thibaut to his supper, and Barbara, asking anxiously what all the noise was in the courtyard, was told that a poor man had fallen into the bear pit, but they had got him out and the bears were not much hurt.

It was late when Thibaut came back to the tower and the children were asleep. Silvain sat in the little room outside theirs reading psalms. "So you have been in another venture, lord," Messire Thibaut grinned.

"What have you heard, brother?"

"I have heard that you are a hero and a paladin. Even Bernabo's men they sing your praises now. But what happened I cannot tell."

"I think some one has tried again, brother," said Silvain mildly. "I think that fall was meant for me."

Thibaut twisted his eyebrows. "Bernabo is the villain then."

"That I do not know."

"It was Bernabo's men who were round the pit."

"Is Bernabo master of his men? Is Bernabo his own master? I do not know. Patience, brother. We are not at the end."

And they lay down to sleep with the door open between their little room and the children's. But they had no more alarms that night, and another day went quietly as those that had gone before.

When Silvain went to supper he found the Mayor with Stefano and the Bishop, and the Mayor was not pleased to see him. "What, is the French knight to sit with us, my lord?" the Mayor growled.

"Sir Silvain is my guest, Paolo," said Stefano with dignity.

"I thought we were to be private."

"I have no secrets from the knight who guards my brother's children."

"What office has he that he should sit with us?" the Mayor grumbled. "Who chose him?"

Stefano laughed. "Not I, Paolo. I think it was fate—and my lord Bishop here."

"I think it was God's hand, my son," said the Bishop gravely.

"I know it was not me," the Mayor growled. "Choose a wolf for your sheep dog, do not blame me if you lose lambs."

"Sir, you are not courteous," said Silvain. "I pray you, why do you speak ill of me?"

The Mayor looked him up and down with contempt. "I do not speak for myself. I speak for the good people of Novara. What they say, I say. By St. Anthony, you shall not stop me, you nor any man."

"Sir, Novara is fortunate," said Silvain gently. "If the gentleman would be private with you, my lords, I am in the way."

"Never heed him, sir. He is surly but honest, our Paolo," Stefano laughed. "Here are no secrets. We have to look to the order of the funeral, that is all."

And so they did while Silvain ate his supper, passing the papers from hand to hand. The Bishop was careful that he should see them all and marked out a place for him to walk by the children in the procession to the

cathedral. And the Mayor scowled but bore it, and Silvain found nothing to change. He left them still talking of funeral pomp.

In the middle of the night as he lay by the children's door, he waked to faint sounds. He was up, sword in hand on the instant, silently. Standing hidden he peered into the children's room. A candle burnt there, making a glimmer of light in the wide, dim spaces. It seemed to him that a shadow moved upon the tapestry. And Barbara started up in her bed crying, "Silvain! Silvain! There is someone in the room."

Silvain came to her, Silvain darted by her bed to the place where that shadow had flickered. The tapestry was swaying. He dashed it aside and saw nothing but the panelling. He could not tell whether it was the panelling that creaked. "Lights, brother, lights," he called, and Thibaut ran in with a lantern and lit candles all round the room.

There was no one to be seen, nothing. But Barbara screamed, "What is it, Silvain? Why did he come? I am afraid, I am afraid!"

"Who came, my queen?" Thibaut croaked.

"I do not know. It was a black man. Silvain! Silvain!" For Silvain was going out by the door that led to the state apartments and Stefano.

Thibaut whirled round. Other people were coming in, servants, women and men, roused by the noise. They made a clamour of questions: "What is it, my lady? Who frightened you?"

"Oh, do not come here," Gian said angrily. "We do not want you. There was a man and Sir Silvain is looking for him."

"A man! Our Lady have mercy!" the women cried, and ran at Barbara who was crying into her pillow.

The men tramped out after Silvain. He had come upon Stefano, Stefano in his bedgown, candle in hand, much distressed. "Holy heaven, sir, what has happened? Are the children in trouble?"

"They saw a man in their room, my lord. I look for him."

"A man in their room! Good angels defend us! Did you see him, sir?"

"I cannot tell."

"You cannot tell!" Stefano laughed angrily and thrust by him into the room. "Gian, what did you see, boy?"

"I did not see anyone. She saw him."

"A black man, a black man," Barbara sobbed.

"Why, the child has been dreaming," said Stefano, and turned on Silvain. "I wonder at you, sir. Rouse the castle because a baby has a bad dream! That is brave, by my faith. You serve her well. You have frightened her little soul with your alarms. A nurse is what she needs, not a knight who makes his own romances." He swept from the room with dignity and the servants tittered, but some of the women cried out that Barbara was a poor lamb and tried to take her to their bosoms. Silvain had much work to get rid of them.

In the morning when he had sent the children out with Thibaut he drew back the tapestry and tried that panelling in daylight. He found the cracks of a sliding door, prised it open with his dagger and came out in the anteroom of the state chamber of the Count of Novara. But it was Stefano who hurried in on him, crying, "What do you seek, sir?"

"Does your brother's ghost walk, my lord?" said Silvain and crossed himself. "God rest him! But there is a door hidden in that wall where my lady Barbara saw her black man."

"Hidden! Why, all the castle knows it."

"But no one told me," said Silvain. And he went back and put nails in that sliding door. But his labour was wasted.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MAYOR AND HIS MOTHER

THE pomp of the funeral was set in array in the courtyard. Bernabo and his men with black scarves upon their breastplates to lead the way, the servants in purple and black, Stefano cloaked and plumed in front of the coffin and its priests, and behind that great expanse of purple the children. Barbara, small and wan in her mourning, shrank against Silvain, Gian stood out boldly, but often he gave a quick side glance at them. Last of all came the chamberlain and the chief butler and a gorgeous aged company of the higher servants.

So they marched out into the streets of Novara, passing through a crowd that hardly left them room. They moved through a murmur of talk, hushed only where the coffin was. And after a little way Silvain saw men point at him. Then some one cried a curse on the foreigner, and as they came into the heart of the town, the long procession winding through narrow streets, he heard a hiss. On the instant the crowd took it up, and all the way to the cathedral as Silvain came men and women hissed him fiercely and made the sign of the evil eye. Gian looked at him and turned a haughty face upon the crowd. Barbara caught his hand and clung to it. And Silvain walked with his head high, looking straight before him and far. And Messire Thibaut shrank into himself and slunk along, a grotesque figure of woe.

But no harm came to him. They passed into the cathedral and there in the gloom, in the wailing music and the heavy incense-laden air found peace. It was a long ordeal for the children, and the proclamation of

all the titles and glories of the dead man, the solemn elaborate ritual of the mass for the dead and the symbols of mortality and the throb of the chants wore away the courage of their troubled hearts. When their father's body was laid at last to rest in the gulf beside the altar, when through the blare of trumpets the funeral procession passed out again into the bright sunshine, Barbara and Gian had each an arm of Silvain's to bear them up and needed it much.

The crowd in the cathedral square had not diminished, not changed its temper. It was noisier than before. When Silvain was seen in the light, not hisses but a roar of hatred met him. "Murderer! Foreign brigand! French wolf! Stand off from our children! Down with him!" So the people howled at him and the crowd seethed and surged.

Close by the cathedral the ground was kept by men of the Bishop's household and for a while Silvain could march freely.

"Pray God no man thinks to throw a stone," Messire Thibaut mumbled in his ear. "Else shall we all be dead as St. Stephen."

Silvain was looking ahead. The procession moved steadily on and found no trouble. Bernabo's horsemen were already out of sight, the ranks of servants, Stefano and his gentlemen, marching away in peace. Only about Silvain the storm raged and there it was loud, and though there came from it nothing but noise, "Turn back, lord," Thibaut muttered, "take sanctuary in the cathedral."

"Peace, brother, peace. If we turn or show fear, we are lost." He strode on boldly and the children huddled against him, wide eyes in wan faces, watching the crowd.

They had turned out of the cathedral square into a narrow street, a street like all the rest, of high walls with few windows and iron-barred oaken gates set far apart, for the houses were built about quadrangles.

Suddenly the procession was broken. Behind Stefano the crowd surged into it and all the street was confusion of jostling people, and through the press came a rush of lads howling, "The French wolf, the murderer!" Silvain thrust the children into Thibaut's arms, Silvain's sword came out and swept a space clear about him. "To the wall, brother," he said. "Into the gateway there," and he broke a way through and Thibaut set the children down in the shelter of the arch of the gate and turned to fight by his master's side.

"Ho, you men of Novara," Silvain shouted, "I fight for your children. Who comes against them?"

The mass of the crowd held off, whether for fear of his sword or shame, but cleaving through, like disciplined men at the charge, came that party of lads howling, "Down with the French wolf! Kill, kill!"

The gate behind the children yielded a little and they tumbled back. Thibaut caught at them with a groan of despair, but Silvain flung himself on the opening, dragged the children in after him and Thibaut and he set their shoulders to the oaken timbers and slammed the gate to and drew the bolts.

"Pity me!" Thibaut gasped. "Was that ill luck or good? Now we are in where are we?" He looked round an empty courtyard, a pleasant place where little trees stood in tubs and a fountain sparkled.

Silvain was lifting from the ground what looked like a bundle of clothes but produced from its midst the yellow wrinkled face of an old woman. She pulled at the cap that covered her sparse hair and her mouth opened to let a squeak of laughter out between toothless gums.

"Good thanks, mother," Silvain said and kissed her and set her down.

Her hands clawed at the children, who shrank from her, "Oh, my pretties, my pretties," she said, and still that squeaking, wheezing laughter came from her.

The mob was beating against the door, and through

the grating Silvain could see faces distorted and slavering. "Open, open! Novara! Novara!" they were yelling. "Who is within? The Frenchman is in your house! Open, open!"

The old woman shuffled off across the courtyard now, beckoning petulantly that they should follow, now laying a finger on her lips. Silvain and Thibaut took the children and caught up with her. "Whose house is this, mother?" Silvain said."

"Master Paolo's," she said, and wheezed out more laughter and took his hand and patted it and still shambled on.

There was movement in the house, too, people hurrying downstairs from the roof or the high windows whence they had been watching the procession. The old woman went the faster. She led into a dark entry and through a storehouse and stopped and struggled with a lock. A narrow door was opened which gave upon a lane. She flung herself upon the children and kissed them as though she would eat them, then she thrust them from her and slammed the door behind them.

"And where are we now we are out?" said Messire Thibaut, looking up and down the empty lane.

On their side were the hinder parts of houses, a range of squalid low buildings. On the other a blank wall of limestone well built and well kept which guarded a park or garden.

"I do not know the cursed town," Messire Thibaut grumbled.

Silvain pointed at a flag which was flying over some house behind the wall. It dropped about the staff half-mast high, but he could make out on it crossed swords and keys. "That must be the Bishop's palace," he said. "Let us trust him, brother."

"I trust none now, as the dog said when the sheep butted him," quoth Thibaut, but he dragged his lank body to the top of the wall.

Silvain lifted Barbara and kissed her wet, strained face and smiled at her: "Courage, my lady. Here you go to the other side of the world," and he swung her up to Thibaut. Gian was climbing by himself. So they came down through the boughs of a fig tree into a quiet garden.

But away in the front of Master Paolo's house there was no quiet.

While the mob still hammered at the door, Master Paolo himself came hurrying into the street, majestic in all his Mayor's dignity, furred robe and gold chain, and his sword-bearer and his mace-bearer laboured to clear a way for him, and he lifted up a mighty voice and called, "Stand off, I charge you, stand off! I will do right."

Some of the boisterous lads at the gate heard him in spite of their own din. "Master Mayor, the Frenchman has carried off the children. He has them in your house."

"In my house?" the Mayor swore. "Are you mad? What accursed folly is this?"

From the other end of the street Bernabo and his men were pushing into the crowd. "Dogs and apes!" Bernabo roared. "Stand back or you taste steel."

Afoot beside him Stefano urged him on. But the crowd, though they shrank from the horses, could not yield them much room, and there was shrieking and struggling and staves were raised and daggers came out and the horsemen were checked. They lacked zeal for this mob fighting.

"By the holy rock, there is the rogue Mayor," said Bernabo.

"Paolo! Where are the children, Paolo?" Stefano called.

"They are in his house. They were taken into the Mayor's house," a woman screamed.

Bernabo dashed spurs into his horse and forced it plunging though the crowd. "Out with them, Paolo!"

he roared. "They are not for you, by God!" And he and one or two of his men and Stefano scrambling among them broke through to the Mayor.

"This is wicked work, captain," the Mayor cried. "Look what you do." For Bernabo's ruthless charge had roused the crowd and some were surging after him and some pressing against the rest of his men to beat them out of the street, and tempers were out of hand.

"Give us the children, you dog."

"If they are in my house, they are safe," the Mayor said. "Safe at last, my lord Stefano."

"What do you mean, sirrah?"

"God knows they were not safe with you, my lord. Neither they nor their father."

"Dog and son of a dog," Bernabo roared and struck at him. Mace-bearer and sword-bearer thrust between them, crying shame.

"Stand by me, good people!" the Mayor called. "These brigands would kill me too. Novara! Novara! The liberties of Novara!"

"Novara!" Many voices answered him and the crowd closed to his aid. One of the lads at the gate slashed with his dagger at Bernabo's horse and the horse fell hamstrung, and the press closed upon Bernabo and Stefano and they and their men went down in the midst fighting like beasts against beasts. There was no help for them. The rest of Bernabo's men were driven out of the street and away crushed and falling on the waves of the mob.

On this evil din came the sound of a psalm: "Put thou thy trust in the Lord and be doing good . . ." The words were lost in the din, the solemn chant made itself heard. The banner of a saint was raised high above the crowd . . . "Leave off from wrath and let go displeasure: fret not thyself, else shalt thou be moved to do evil."

It came from the cathedral square. Borne in a chair on men's shoulders, all white and gold, the Bishop was seen. The crowd made way for him and the singing priests about him and so he drew near the fight, and when he saw it he lifted up his hands and cried, "My children, my children, will you kill me too? In the name of God, peace!" Then he pointed his finger at the Mayor and called: "Paolo! Paolo, stand out and answer me! Here is the devil's work. By whose will, Paolo?"

But the fight was over then, for Bernabo and Stefano were beaten down and their men were swept away, and the Mayor made answer quietly enough "By whose will, my lord? Ask them who lie there!"

"God have mercy! What have you done?"

"I have struck no man, my lord," said Paolo. "Here came the rogue Bernabo and my lord Stefano and set upon me and the people would not bear it and there they lie."

"Oh, miserable!" the Bishop cried. "Will you leave them lying like beasts in the dust?"

"Now God forbid," said the Mayor. "They shall be cared for," and he bustled off to his gate, which now stood ajar with servants clustering to peer out. These he swept away, flinging the gate wide. "Lift them and bring them in, they are welcome," he called over his shoulder, and himself went on and caught his steward by the arm and drew the fellow into a corner of the courtyard. "What the devil have you been at, Giuseppe? What is this of the children? Where are they?"

"By the holy rock, that is more than I know, master. I think they are bewitched. We were all up aloft looking out at the funeral and there was a riot and the children and the Frenchman were penned at the gate. Then the gate came open, God knows how, we could not see, we were watching the street. But when we

ran down the gate was shut and there was no one in the courtyard. The crowd was beating at the gate, but I dared not open. Then came your fight."

"Who the devil opened the gate?"

"The devil himself for all I know."

"Oh, fool! Where are the children gone? They must be hidden somewhere." The Mayor hurried into the house.

A bundle of clothes was huddled by the tub of one of the orange trees. It wheezed laughter as he went and a gaunt yellow face came out of it and nodded.

Beside Stefano and Bernabo where they lay in the hall the Bishop knelt. But Stefano was dead already, and Bernabo, though still his hand was clenched on his dagger, breathed up blood and groaned. "God give you mercy, my son," the Bishop said. "Do you go to Him clean?"

"Where are the children?" Bernabo said thickly.

"Alas, I cannot tell. Oh, my son, think of your own soul now. Do you go clean to God?"

Bernabo groaned and his tortured eyes rolled. "I was true to my lord Camillo while he lived," he muttered.

"Be glad of that in this hour. You have been true to the end."

Bernabo looked at the Bishop. Bernabo raised himself on his elbow and looked at Stefano's dead face. "He is gone," he said. "I go too. Let it be," and he laughed.

The Bishop held up the golden cross that hung from his breast. Bernabo looked away. "Oh, my son, is it well with your soul?"

"As well as with his," Bernabo grinned. "Will you shrive us both? We go together, where we go. And he leads, by God. I have nothing on my soul but his work. He set me on to kill the Frenchman. I am sorry for it. The man is a bold knight."

"God forgive you your sin," the Bishop cried. "Oh, what ill had the man done you?"

"Stefano—Stefano wanted to come at the children—the Frenchman—he was in the way."

The Mayor bustled into the hall red and fuming. He saw the Bishop and Bernabo close in talk. "What has that rogue to say, my lord?" he cried and came to them.

"Aha, Paolo, old Paolo," Bernabo said thickly and he grinned. "Here is a secret for you, old Paolo." And as the Mayor bent to hear he drove his dagger into the man's eye.

Down upon him the Mayor fell and they lay together in their blood. But it was Bernabo who chuckled till in a little while he died. . . .

The Mayor's servants brought into the hall that old, old woman and led her to where the Bishop prayed by the dead.

"Paolo is gone," she crooned. "Paolo is gone too."

The Bishop opened his eyes and flinched. "Alas, poor mother, pray for your son," he said.

"I do not pray," the old woman made mouths at him. "I knew Paolo. He is gone." She shuffled out to the courtyard again and sat down in the sunshine. . . .

The Bishop came by her on his way out and he crossed himself and blessed her. But she was asleep.

Out in the streets the crowd was noisy, here cursing Bernabo and his men, there arguing over the fame of the Mayor, and all around debating where the children might be. The good people of Novara found life vastly interesting.

Through their babble the Bishop was borne in his golden chair, heeding no one, hiding a wan face in his hand. To his palace he came. A chaplain hurried to help him to the ground, and taking the weary arm said eagerly, "Come, my lord, come, we have guests for

you." The Bishop lifted his eyes. "The children, my lord."

An arbour of golden Austrian roses threw shade on the turf above a pond where lilies swam white and in the shade the children lay asleep. Beside them a fountain murmured and made little rainbows, and by the fountain sat Silvain giving crumbs in his hand to a dove.

The Bishop stood still. "God be thanked," he murmured and said a prayer. "Oh, my friend," he leaned heavily on Silvain's shoulder, "I have come out of hell."

Silvain looked up and his eyes were bright and hard: "They also, the little ones," he said. "By my faith, they have suffered. Are they safe here, my lord? They come to your arms for refuge. Are you strong enough to uphold them?"

The Bishop smiled sadly. "It is not by my strength they are delivered. I am a weak man and blind. God forgive me, my town was in the hands of wickedness and I did not know. I did not know. Oh, my son, the reek of blood is upon me." And he told of the fight of Bernabo and Stefano and the Mayor and the mob and Bernabo's confession and his killing of the Mayor.

"It is for the soul of Bernabo I will say a prayer," said Silvain gently.

The Bishop shuddered. "He of them all! He who died doing murder!"

"He died killing like a wolf at bay. But it is in my heart that Bernabo was no wolf when this work began. Not he nor his murdered Count Camillo. That I know well."

"Who then?" the Bishop stared at him.

"My lord, why did the town hiss at me to-day? Who taught them? Why did lads rush upon me as I walked with the children? Who were they? One I knew and another and they were of the band that killed Count Camillo. I pray you, who was it that could raise the town and had his murderers in the town? Master

Mayor knows that, my lord," Silvain smiled. "I do not pray for him, not I."

The Bishop quivered. "What fancy is this?" he cried. "It was Stefano who sought to murder you and the children, Bernabo confessed it."

"I do not doubt him. Thus I see the thing, my father. Your Mayor planned to kill Count Camillo and the children that he might hold Novara at his will. For Stefano was weak and he would be an easy meal. I came on the murderers before their work was done and the father only was killed and the children lived. But then Stefano saw only two children between him and the throne. Weak he was and he was tempted. He plotted to murder me and them. But the Mayor held to his purpose. He was the shrewder man. He saw that he might raise the town against me and strike the children down in killing me. It was a good plot, my lord."

The Bishop stared at him. "God have mercy, who knows the minds of men," he murmured. "Oh, Paolo! Paolo! And he died in a moment, black with sin!" he shuddered. "And his own mother would not pray for him."

"His mother?" Silvain said quickly. "An old, old woman? She was watching this riot. She saw the children's peril. She let us into his house and led us away. So are we safe. And all the while she laughed."

"She—she knew then! The mother who bore him! God help her." The Bishop bowed his head in his hands. . . . "But she stood guard that he should not accomplish his sin. By the mercy of our Lord he may be saved for his mother's sake."

Silvain did not answer, and the only sound in the garden was the prattle of the fountain and the murmur of the pigeons and the quiet breath of the children as they slept.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MOOR OF MILAN

"NOW my master," said Messire Thibaut, "has the nature of a baby, which being in bed tries to fall out, or being by the fire tries to fall in: is never content with what it has and (to sum up) wants the world: such is my master."

This is to explain why Silvain rode out from the pleasant town of Novara. There he had honour and revenues, there he was loved, but it gave him nothing to do. While the boy who reigned there and his sister were in peril Silvain was content to guard them. But in their weakness their neighbours had not assailed them, and soon alliance with the Duke of Savoy made them safe against any enemy. The children had no more need of him, Novara basked in peace, and Silvain rode away.

He made over the dank rice-fields for Milan in quest of deeds. Milan offered good hope of war. Its master, Lodovico Sforza, whom men called the Moor because his face was dark, had to meet danger from the southward. Florence and Naples were arming against him. He had the name of a subtle and bold captain, he was likely to be pressed hard. In his affairs Silvain saw promise of noble ventures. And it was common talk that Lodovico had won the King of France to come to his help. Then a knight who fought for Lodovico would find himself fighting under the golden lilies in the army of France. Silvain asked no better fortune of God for life or death.

So he rode happily over that sombre misty plain,

mighty handsome with his blue and gold and his glittering breastplate and his gallant black charger, and Messire Thibaut had a good Lombardy mare, and the steel on his narrow chest was engraved and bright and the rest of him crimson velvet (which made his gaunt face look the hungrier), and he led a horse which bore a great pack of armour and fine clothes. With all these riches they caught up a knight who had none.

He was solid in the saddle, not a great height but square. No squire rode with him, and he carried all his own armour and arms—helmet on, shield hung from his neck, lance upright in the stirrup—and all were good honest stuff and well kept but plain.

Silvain saluted him. "We go the same way, sir. Give me leave to ride with you."

"If you choose a poor man's company you are welcome," the stranger answered readily. His vizor was up and Silvain saw a round rosy face smiling. The man was younger than his square bulk suggested, he looked a simple lad.

"I have my fortune to win yet," Silvain smiled back.

"And I have all to win and only myself to lose."

"Sir, I think we are made to be friends. I am Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of France, and I ride through the world seeking honour."

The stranger bowed to the great name. "For my part I am riding to Milan," he said, "and my name is Louis Bonivard. I have come out of Switzerland to take my pleasure in Italy." He laughed shyly. "You see, I am nobody, Sir Silvain. And you—you are a knight of renown. It is a great thing to me to ride by your side."

"Are your ventures all to come, Louis? Happy man!"

"I cannot tell. God send I shall not fail in my hour," said Louis humbly, and began to make Silvain talk of his adventures. He had an eager appetite for tales of fighting and plied Silvain with questions how each deed

was done and his wonder and his boyish praises were pleasant to hear.

But Messire Thibaut, jogging along behind, made grimaces. "What does this Switzer want of us?" said he to himself. "Oh, my master, tell me what a great man you are, quoth my wife as she felt for my purse."

Louis Bonivard seemed to want nothing but to hear how Silvain had broken into a castle here or out of a castle there and every device of rescue or flight, and they came very happily to Milan and there the only harm that he did was to confess he could not afford so fine an inn as that which Messire Thibaut thought fit for his master's greatness. He was for going off alone to some humbler place, and when Silvain swore they should lodge together he had many shy excuses and apologies. And Thibaut, though he made a sour face at the little remote tavern to which they came, could not much blame the lad who would plainly have been well content to part from them. And Louis, like a good youth, fell to grooming his horse and cleaning his armour while Silvain went out to see the town.

None so busy, none so rich he had found in all his travels. It bewildered him. He lingered awhile where, dimly seen through a veil of workmen's tackle, the white magnificence of the cathedral rose for his worship. He went on to discover a town of palaces and townsfolk with the state and the airs of courtiers. He must needs wonder how so many people could be wealthy and who could buy all the show of silver ware and silken stuffs in the shops. A town of enchantment, a paradise of the works of men. He was ill at ease. Not in such a place as this was there honour for a bright sword. He came to the castle and saw a troop of hired men-at-arms march out. They were trained men, well drilled, and their equipment gorgeous, but they had no spirit in them, they moved like lacqueys. They made a square before the castle and a crowd gathered and gaped and a herald came out and made proclamation of

a trial at arms to which the lord Lodovico bade all gentlemen of noble blood.

Silvain went back to his little tavern singing to himself. Louis Bonivard was in a corner with pen and paper. "Do you write chronicles or ballads, child?" Silvain laughed.

"If you please, I keep my accounts," said Louis Bonivard.

Silvain opened his eyes. Such a knight was new to him. "Here is better work for you, Louis," he said gently. "They hold a trial of arms in Milan tomorrow."

"Oh, sir, you will win rich honour," said Louis Bonivard.

"We will venture ourselves," Silvain smiled. "It is a noble chance for a young knight. All Italy will hear of him who does gallantly."

"I?" said Bonivard. "Alas, my lord, I dare not. I have not proved myself."

Silvain frowned. "By my faith, that is a reason to dare, not flinch, child."

"I would not flinch in fight, I think," said Bonivard meekly. "But I do not seek a fight, sir. I have no mind to match myself against proved champions. I should go down."

This reasonable temper was disgusting to Silvain. He set himself for the good of Louis Bonivard's soul to shame the lad into riding in the joust. Bonivard was humble, smooth, impenetrable. Silvain could not make him feel that to stand out of a trial for fear of failure was dishonour. Nothing stirred him, not reproach nor appeal nor mockery. Silvain could hardly believe he was real. And at last in despair, "Fie, go to your accounts. That is fit work for you," he cried and stalked away, and Louis Bonivard made a supper of bread and beans and went off to sleep by his horse. In the morning he was gone.

Silvain and Thibaut in all their glory rode out to the

castle. The lists were set in the tiltyard, where under a canopy sat the lord Lodovico and his lady Beatrice and their Court. At one end a triple tent was hung with three shields, for the order of the fight was that three of Lodovico's captains defied all who came against them. At the other end gathered those ready to venture, and heralds took their name and rank. Each man might choose which shield his squire should strike, which captain he would challenge and attack. When Silvain gave his name he asked which of the three was accounted the best knight. The heralds answered him that all were great champions.

"God be thanked," said he. "Go forward, brother, and strike upon each shield and all."

Then the marshals of the lists whispered together and the other knights who had come to the joust, flashing Italian soldiers of fortune, stared at him, and one cried out: "Who are you, sir, that you should go first?"

"Sir, I am a stranger and claim to go before no man. But I crave leave to answer any man who hangs up his shield to fight."

The end of that was that others began the joust, and with ill fortune. For the three captains, Ercole of Mantua and Gottfried the Saxon and Basil of Rhodes, were nobly mounted and equipped, and though none of them had the vigour of youth they were heavy men and strong in the saddle and ready with all the devices of the tiltyard. Man after man went down before their lances, and the only point they lost in a dozen courses was by chance when a youth from Genoa on a wild horse broke his lance on Basil, though Basil missed him as he swerved.

The townspeople were cheering the three companions of Milan, the great folks under the canopy whispering and yawning, and the lord Lodovico was heard to swear that there was no young blood in Italy, when Thibaut rode down the lists and made a lance head chime on each of the three shields.

Lodovico bent a dark brow to stare at him and sent to ask who his master might be, and the ladies tittered and called Messire Thibaut a splendid scarecrow.

"Like master, like man," quoth Lodovico. "Here is some mad knight-errant."

"Then he is very welcome, my lord," said the lady Beatrice. "God have mercy, we need a madman in Milan. Here is nothing but cold sanity," and she made believe to shiver.

Lodovico smiled at her. "I am condemned. You live in romance, lady, and I in this dull world. It is my misfortune."

A herald came to Lodovico and said that the challenger was a Frenchman, Silvain de St. Lo.

"I was in the right, Beatrice," Lodovico laughed. "A madman it is—the knight-errant of Novara."

"That man! Look to me well, my lord, I lost my heart to him long ago. Oh, I pray that he will go down!"

"What? Why should you want him beaten if you love him?"

She laughed. "Oh, man, man! I would have him defeated that I might comfort him. And I know he would be divine in defeat."

But she was not to see Silvain beaten that day. When he rode against Ercole, who was accounted the strongest of the three champions, each man broke his first lance fairly with no advantage, and at the second, Silvain riding faster and coming forward sharply in the saddle at the shock, struck Ercole upon the helmet and hurled him down. Then Gottfried came out and tried to use Silvain's own tactics against him, but rode so fast that his aim at Silvain's head was wild and Silvain swayed from it and the point missed, while Gottfried crashed upon Silvain's lance and was brought up with shattered shield and the lance head in his arm. Basil the knight from Rhodes was cunning, and in the first course swerved and crossed Silvain and struck him on

the body, a foul stroke. The marshals spoke together, conferred with Lodovico and proclaimed that Basil was vanquished. Silvain demanded a second course. Basil was sullen and yielded only when Lodovico sent to bid him win back his honour. He rode out like a beaten man. He was hurled from the saddle bent and whirling. And Silvain turned his horse and came back to the heralds and bade them proclaim that Sir Silvain de St. Lo would ride a course against any knight who sought to win honour that day.

Ercole, the vanquished Ercole, sent a herald to ask that Silvain would ride another course with him. It was against the rule and the marshals came to confer with Lodovico. "Ercole is down," said he. "Why should the Frenchman let him up again? But if he will he may." So they left it to Silvain to decide.

"Why, my lords," he cried, "how should I refuse a knight who would prove himself upon me? Let us ride it, I pray you."

When Lodovico heard that he shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "Here is a gambler!" quoth he. "Having won all the stakes, he will set them all on another cast."

"A dear mad fellow," said the lady Beatrice. "I pray that he loses. That would be perfect."

But he did not lose. Ercole came on a fresh horse and Silvain on the charger that had carried him in all his courses. Ercole rode at a great pace and aimed at Silvain's helm and struck it indeed. But Silvain going soberly bent forward to the shock and the lance point glanced up and away, and Ercole having made ready for a heavy blow which did not come reeled in the saddle as Silvain's lance met his shield. He was thrust from his horse easily like a bad rider and heard men laugh as he fell. And once more the heralds proclaimed him vanquished.

"I pray you, sirs," said Silvain, "ask if any other

knight will come against me that I may help him to win honour."

But Lodovico stood up and cried, "Enough, enough! Sir Silvain de St. Lo, we judge you victor. For you have conquered by skill in arms and by courtesy. You have the honour of this trial."

Then the marshals came to Silvain and took off his helmet and led him between them to the lady Beatrice and he knelt at her feet and she put over his head a golden chain, and there were trumpets for him and shouting.

In this manner Silvain came to lodge in the castle of Milan. For Lodovico, as the custom was, made him the guest of honour at a banquet and then would not let him go, swearing that he could not afford to lose a knight of such prowess. It seemed to Silvain that the trial at arms had been planned to discover a champion for Lodovico's service, and he was content. But the only task offered him was to amuse the lady Beatrice. She took possession of him, she would not tire of making him talk.

In her bower, a place of white marble and ebony and silver, she lay on a couch lithe and beautiful in a gown that clung rosy about her and left white shoulders and bosom bare. She set her hands behind her head hidden in her golden hair and laughed at him. "What do you want of the world?" she said. "You have lived your life winning fortune for other folk and your youth goes by and you have no joy of it and——"

"Lady, I have never known man nor woman who lived happier."

"Then look at me!" she cried.

"Indeed that would make any man happy."

"By my faith, it has made some men wretched, Silvain," she smiled. "Look at me, then. I have all things at my desire, riches and honour and power. And you are a lonely, poor knight, who has won nothing

by all his striving and must die naked as he was born."

"So must we all," Silvain said.

"But I shall have lived my life. You will have had nothing of yours."

"By God's grace, I have done some little things," Silvain said gently.

"And I have done nothing? Is that it? Why, child, the world will talk of Beatrice of Milan when you are dead and dust. I have had power over men. But let me be what you say. I have done nothing, I am nothing! Then in God's name, why do you come to serve me?"

"I serve those who need, lady. For the joy of the venture and the honour."

She flung out her white arms and pointed at him: "He saves others, himself he will not save!" And she laughed. "A saint you are, not a knight nor a man."

It was there or thereabouts that Lodovico came in. He was with them before they knew it for he had a stealthy manner, he looked from one to the other, there was no sign of what he thought on his handsome dark face, but he said with a clank of mockery: "You amuse my wife, sir. You are more fortunate than I am."

"Why, he thinks he is," said Beatrice. "I have never known a man so pleased with himself. Show him all that you have, my lord, and he will say, 'I thank you. I had rather be Silvain de St. Lo.' "

"He is happy," said Lodovico.

"Oh, happy!" she cried. "But why does he come to Milan? Did ever you meet a man in your house who wanted nothing?"

"There is no such man in the world," said Lodovico.

"At least I have never seen him," Silvain smiled. "Sir, my lady jeers at me. I am the greediest soul alive. I have sought fortune and honour all my days."

"And what have you won?" said the lady. "Not six feet of ground for your grave."

"I have had honour of men," Silvain said gently. "I have my fame that I could lay at the feet of God if I die to-night. And my life is not lived yet."

Lodovico looked at his wife. Lodovico's thin lips smiled. "You are right. He wants nothing of you. That is what a woman cannot forgive. What will you give him, Beatrice? Death?" He turned to Silvain. "You have made an enemy, sir." His smile faded, his dark face was expressionless. "It is unfortunate. I had something to offer you, but my lady rules all."

"You!" Beatrice laughed. "What could you give him, Lodovico? If you gave him all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them he would not serve you."

"You are bitter, madam," said Lodovico. "I pray you let us speak man to man. Sir, I have only a venture to give you, a venture of danger and honour. I ask your service for a woman in need. You are free to choose."

"My lord, I shall thank you for any noble venture," said Silvain.

"It is this. Pavia was friendly to Milan of old and I do not hide from you it is much to me in the war which comes upon us that the town should be friendly still. Its lord died in the spring and his only heir is the lady Clarissa. But he kept a company of hireling soldiers, and their chief Carlo the Sicilian has seized the town and the lady, and he holds her prisoner and has made himself lord of Pavia in her stead. If I march against him and make a siege of the town, before I break in he will surely kill her. I find no hope for her in war or policy. To take up her cause is to condemn her to death. I dare not do it. So here is a venture desperate enough. I am frank with you. If you can save her it will serve me well, for I can fight for her right and drive Carlo to the devil and win the town. But it is for her I bid you go. She must waste away in prison

or die murdered when her death will serve Carlo, unless a man comes who can deliver her."

Beatrice smiled. "You bid the man go to his death, my lord," she said. "For the joy of the venture and the honour of it!" and she looked at Silvain and laughed.

"I go, lady," Silvain said.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TOWER ON THE WALL

PAVIA stands where rivers meet in the plain. It stood within great walls then and men called it the city of a hundred towers, so many there were on the ramparts and within the town, gaunt things of ancient brick. Into Pavia as the evening mists were rising from the wet rice-fields came two shabby travellers. They were soldiers by trade, they said at the humble tavern to which they went, they hired themselves out to merchants who needed a guard for their caravans of goods, they were looking for another job, but times were bad and at the best it was a dog's life. Please St. Nicholas, they might find business doing in Pavia.

Such was the tale Thibaut told the landlord over a flask of harsh red Lombardy wine and he told it well. But at the end he looked up into the simple young face of Louis Bonivard. It was Messire Thibaut who showed surprise. Louis Bonivard saluted him with a stranger's civility. "A new-comer, sir? You have chosen a good inn," and turned away to speak to a servant and went out.

In the street Silvain came up behind him. "Sir, we must know each other better," Silvain said and linked arms with him.

"Sir, you flatter me. But when we parted you did not want to know any more of me. Well, I was content."

"It is possible I have done you a wrong. I did not expect to meet Louis Bonivard in Pavia."

Bonivard looked quickly round him. There was no one near them. "I ride through Italy for my pleasure," he said.

Silvain smiled. "Pavia is no town of pleasure."

"You are wrong, sir. I have had very pleasant hours in Pavia."

"Pray sir, show me how to enjoy the place."

Bonivard hesitated. "What do you want of me?" he said in a low voice. "Why do you follow me?"

"By my faith, I did not follow you. That I should find you in Pavia I never thought when I came."

"Then go your way and let me go mine. You despise me, you told me so. What I do is nothing to you and I promise you, what you may do is nothing to me."

"Sir, you are very mysterious."

"I?" Bonivard laughed. "I am a simple Swiss gentleman riding to see the world. But you"—he shrugged—"my God, what are you? If I go to the castle and tell my lord Carlo that Silvain de St. Lo is in the town in disguise you will not long be free."

"Who knows?" Silvain smiled. "For you will not go, my friend."

"I owe you nothing and I do not fear you."

"Then go if you will and betray me. It is true, I am here by stealth and in disguise. I have come to Pavia to deliver the lady Clarissa from her prison. Here is news that Carlo will pay a price for, my friend."

"You are mad," said Louis Bonivard, and again he looked behind him. Then he began to laugh. "Why do you tell me such a tale?"

"Because it is true. See, I am in your hand, Louis. Betray me, go your own way, join with me—you have the choice."

Bonivard did not answer. He turned sharp out of the narrow street into the square before the castle and led Silvain into the middle of it. There certainly no one could overhear them. "You are very careful, Louis," Silvain smiled.

"What is the lady Clarissa to you?" said Bonivard in a low voice.

"I never saw her. But she is a woman in captivity. It is a knight's work to deliver her."

"What have you to gain by it?"

"Oh, Louis, Louis!" Silvain shook his head. "You are still keeping accounts! I seek nothing and nothing shall I take but the honour of the venture."

"But it is a mad thing," said Bonivard heavily. "She is here in prison and Carlo has five hundred men-at-arms in his pay. What can you do for her?"

"Have you found no way to her yet?" said Silvain softly.

Bonivard stopped and stared at him and at last, "Swear that you will be true to her, Sir Silvain," he said.

"I have never been false to man or woman. By my father's soul I will be true to you and your lady."

Bonivard grasped his hand. "I should thank God for you. This is a hard venture. But tell me how did you know I came for her? If any man suspects me, there is no hope for me or her."

Silvain laughed. "I think no man knows you but me, Louis. You are the wariest youth in the world. But you puzzled me. You were so eager to hear of knightly ventures, yet when one came you would not take it. I thought then it was for your own sake you were careful. But still you puzzled me. When I found you here in Pavia I saw light. You were not your own man. You had saved yourself for a nobler venture. I put you to the test and you showed me yourself while you tried to hide. Forgive me, Louis."

"I might have trusted you," Bonivard said. "Sir, I loved the lady Clarissa long ago and while her father lived I had hope of her. For she gave me her heart, though he planned a better marriage. Then his death came and this knave Carlo flung her into prison. My father bade me forget her, for our lands are far away by Geneva and he would not venture his strength in Italy. But I was bound to her and I am here."

"It is well done," said Silvain. "And now what is to do? In which of the hundred towers is your lady? Have you found her yet?"

"I have found her," Bonivard said heavily.

They passed through the dark streets and climbed the rampart where it was low on the river bank. Close upon the water, bulging out from the rampart like a buttress, rising high above it, stood a tower.

Bonivard stopped. "She is there. It is the red tower, where the lords of Pavia kept the townsfolk who troubled them. And if the town tried to rescue them, they were flung into the river."

"She is there," Silvain repeated and looked long. He could make out no guard at the gate, but in the dark mass of the tower a narrow window here and there made a point of light. "You are sure?"

Bonivard whistled a scrap of a tune. Silvain recognized an old folk song:

> When at night I lie in bed
> I bethink me of my love.

It was lost in the murmur of the river. But one of the lights in the tower moved, it was hidden, something white waved from a window. "She is there," Bonivard said. "She is waiting. And I—I cannot tell what to do."

"Go and sleep, Louis. I watch," said Silvain.

"Watch here? You must not be seen. That would destroy us all."

Silvain laughed. "I was never yet seen unless I chose. Go, child, go. Tell my brother Thibaut I do not need him this night."

In the morning he came reeling into the tavern like a man who had spent the night in a debauch, and while he slept Messire Thibaut complained to the landlord that he was a sad fellow, a weak fellow- a drunken dog. When he waked, he had nothing to tell the anxious Bonivard but that he would watch another night.

When he came back on the second day, weak in the leg again and confused in the head, Messire Thibaut swore to the landlord that he had enough of it and there was no holding the fellow in a town and they must take the road again. So as soon as Silvain could be waked, he was set on his horse, and led away. Out of Pavia they went and beyond the town Louis Bonivard caught them up. "What device is this, sir?" he said eagerly. "You do not trust me, though I have trusted in you."

"I shall trust you with my life to-night, child," Silvain said. "Be patient. If we have not our horses safe beyond the town there is no safety."

Bonivard stared and saw that Thibaut had a led horse with a bundle on its back. "Yes, lord, here is your lady's horse and here is her saddle," said Thibaut. "That I have found for you. Go find the lady, that is your part."

They left Messire Thibaut with all the horses and came back to the town afoot and stole in in the dusk by another gate, and in another tavern Louis Bonivard wrote his lady a letter thus: "Do not sleep, but be ready."

When it was dark they walked on the ramparts and coming near the tower Silvain took from under his cloak an orange and tossed it up into the barred window from which the lady had waved. "Please God she is alone," Bonivard muttered.

"They kept her alone," said Silvain placidly. "She could never have come to the window else. Do not begin to fear, brother."

Alone she was, for in a while she came to the window again and waved her scarf.

"The letter is read," said Silvain. "We have no more to do here this long while," and he took Bonivard to supper at the other end of the town.

When honest folk were abed, they came to the riverside again and at the steps by the bridge Silvain stayed a moment and counted the boats tied there and stole

down and looked at their fastenings. Then he climbed back to the ramparts and they drew into the shadow of the battlements and waited.

All the clocks of Pavia had struck twelve. The officer of the night was going his rounds. They saw him coming back from the bridge gate on the farther bank, lit by a lantern that his sergeant carried. Sergeant and officer climbed to the ramparts. As they came by Silvain rose and struck at their heads. Both men went down before they knew it and the only sound was the thud of the falling bodies. Then Silvain and Bonivard lashed them up together in their own girdles and gagged them with their own dagger hilts and took their cloaks from them and their lantern and went on to the tower.

Muffled in the officer's cloak Silvain knocked and when he was challenged made answer as he had heard answer given on other nights, that he was the officer of the rounds. The door was opened. A sleepy sergeant of the guard grinned and asked if the captain would drink a cup of wine.

Silvain strode into a dim-lit entry. Out of it a winding stair climbed up the tower. A door stood open from it to a guard-room beyond where three men sprawled at their ease.

The sergeant turned away to fetch the wine. His keys were snatched from his hand. He found himself lying on his face in the guard-room and heard the door slam behind him. Before he or his men had collected their wits they were locked in.

Bonivard darted up the stair with the keys in his hand. He cried, "Clarissa! Clarissa!" heard her answer, and found the door of the cell and had her in his arms.

"Swift, my children," Silvain called.

The men in the guard-room had begun to hammer at the door and shout, but the door was strong and the windows were barred.

Bonivard and his Clarissa came tumbling downstairs,

Silvain thrust them out before him and shut the door of the tower and locked it and tossed the keys into the river. Bonivard and he took the girl between them and ran along the ramparts. From the tower the clamour of the imprisoned guard came dull on the night air.

"They will rouse the town," Bonivard panted.

"Time is all," said Silvain. "Do not fear yet, brother."

But the woman laughed. "What is fear now?" she said.

They came to the steps by the bridge and scrambled into a boat and Silvain lashed with his sword at the ropes that bound the other boats and set all adrift on the swift stream.

Down-stream they sped close under the ramparts and as they went heard footsteps above them and voices, saw lights moving towards the clamour in the tower. But safe and unchallenged they came beyond the walls and rowed on through the thin mist.

An owl hooted over the bank. Silvain looked round. "Pull your left, brother," he said and lay on his oars. The boat turned out of the rush of the stream into slack water, brushed against reeds and shallows. The owl hooted again. Silvain bent to his oars and the boat came into the bank by firm ground.

There stood Messire Thibaut with his horses and his teeth chattered. Bonivard swung his lady ashore and put her in the saddle.

But Thibaut grunted. "Now are we out of the trap, as the rats said when they were let loose for the dogs."

"Ride, brother, ride," Silvain said. "The road to Milan."

"That is the road of all roads they will look for us, lord."

"It is the only road to safety, brother. Forward, forward!"

Messire Thibaut led on through the night mists.

They had to cross the fields by a narrow causeway on which they could make no speed.

When they came at last to the high road Silvain bade the others ride on and himself halted to listen. Through the quiet murmurs of the night harsher sounds were borne: he heard a trumpet call and another.

"So! They are after us already," he smiled. "This Carlo is better served than I thought." He galloped away. When he was up with the others he bade Thibaut lead and set such a pace as a company of men-at-arms could hold keeping together. "So we shall spare our horses and they will not gain on us."

"But who told you they will keep together, lord?" Thibaut protested. "Surely they will send on their best horses at their best speed."

"I shall be ready, brother," said Silvain. "You are the guide, Sir Louis rides with his lady. I am the rear-guard. Forward!"

And what happened was what he had foreseen. The pursuers, not knowing how strong the fugitives might be, held together but sent light horsemen on ahead to find them. The dark of the night fought for Silvain, who when he heard a horse gaining on him halted and waited and dashed at the rider unawares and beat him down. So he held off the scouts, and the main body coming upon one man and another overthrown were assured that they had a strong force in front of them and followed the more soberly, and the fugitives made mile after mile towards Milan and kept their lead.

But Messire Thibaut looked to the eastward and groaned, "The night is our friend," said he. "Now comes the day."

A streak of the eastern sky gave a pale light, clear between cloud banks. The mist over the rice-fields grew silvery. Silvain drew up beside Bonivard. "Forward, now, Louis," he said. "No more use to nurse the horses. Carry her off. Ride, ride!"

Bonivard looked at him. "You have the honour," he said hoarsely. "Come, Clarissa," and they galloped on.

Silvain and Thibaut held their old steady pace and Thibaut looked about him over the open country, where was no cover near or far, nor any turn in the straight road, and hunched his shoulders. "Pity me," he grunted. "I shall die without my breakfast."

They were seen. The squadron behind made them out, saw how few they were and broke rank and came roaring on. Silvain checked and turned and drew his sword. But some one else had seen them too. Away down the road to Milan a single horseman was halted holding aloft a lance with a pennon and he blew a trumpet call and cried a challenge to Bonivard.

Silvain turned again. "Milan!" he shouted. "Friends of Milan! Milan to aid!" and Thibaut and he galloped after Bonivard. "Silvain of France I am," he cried as he came. "I ride for the lord Lodovico."

Other horsemen were coming up to the man with the lance. They barred the road, they brought Bonivard and the lady to a stand.

"Let them pass, friends," Silvain cried. "I bring them to the lord Lodovico. And here is Carlo of Pavia hunting us and we are spent. Hold off his knaves for me."

The horsemen were now some half score and had an officer. He stared at Silvain, raised his hand in salute: "Open out, lads. Let them pass. Ride to the captain, Beppo, and tell him Sir Silvain has come with the girl and a pack of wolves at his heels. How many, my lord?"

"Call them fifty, sir. Good thanks."

"I call them a hundred. No matter, we will make play. And Ercole is behind. Good thanks to you, my lord. Here is sport. Ride on, ride on!"

He set his men going and dashed at the leaders of the

pursuit, and Silvain, looking over his shoulder, saw the first of a pretty skirmish, but his horse was jaded and he sighed and rode on after Bonivard.

Before them loomed up the walls of an old castle and out of it came troops of men-at-arms. Bonivard stopped and looked back at Silvain. "Where have you brought us, sir?" he said in a low voice.

"Why, that is Binasco, a castle of Lodovico's. We are on his land now. By my faith, it was time, Louis." Silvain laughed and looked back at the skirmish. "He keeps good watch on his frontier."

"Is Lodovico your lord?" Bonivard frowned. "He is none of mine. I do not trust him."

"He and his have saved you. And safe you are, Louis. Trust me."

A burly knight came cantering up at the head of a squadron, Ercole, Silvain's old foe of the trial of arms. "Well done, brother," he laughed and waved his hand. "I do the rest," and he clattered on to the fight and after him came another squadron of horse and a great company of footmen.

Slowly along the side of the road Silvain and his party came to the castle. "What have you for me now?" Bonivard said sullenly.

"A day's sleep, child," Silvain smiled. "That is her need," and he looked at Clarissa who hung over her horse's neck and swayed.

"In Lodovico's castle? Not I. I ride on. I will not trust him."

"You are my guest, Sir Louis," Silvain said. "I pray you, is there any reason why you should not trust me?"

"Oh, Louis!" Clarissa said and looked at him piteously and began to cry.

"Hush, hush, for God's sake," Bonivard cried.

"She has borne enough," Silvain said gently. "You are safe, lady, you and he. I say it, I Silvain de St. Lo. Go in."

Into the castle courtyard they rode and a sleek

seneschal, bowing low before Silvain, declared that the castle was at his orders, for the lord Lodovico had sent orders to give Sir Silvain de St. Lo all honour if he came.

Silvain smiled. It seemed to him that Lodovico felt a proper confidence in his success. And honour they had at Binasco, zealous service, rich fare, and rooms of luxury and quiet, and so slept out the day.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MOOR AND HIS LADY

SILVAIN waked in the gloaming with a servant beside him who said that the lady Beatrice had come to the castle and bade him wait on her.

He was taken to the warden's tower and went up to the council chamber and found her there alone. She started up and saluted him like a man. "Hail, conqueror!" she laughed. "I have flown to your triumph. All hail! And now you have won her, what will you do with her? Give her away?"

"No, my lady."

Beatrice clasped her hands and made a face of languishing ecstasy. "Oh, heaven! The all-conquering is conquered at last! He has found a creature worthy of his excellence. He deigns to be in love. But what honour for her! I——"

"No, my lady," said Silvain. "I have not given her to anyone because she was not mine to give. I have no right over the lady Clarissa."

Beatrice made a parody of a royal gesture of refusal. "The devil take you, you will be noble," said she. " 'No, my princess,' " she mimicked Silvain's voice, " 'I have won you, but I will not wear you. I have no right. Do not cry. It is true you do not interest me. But no one does except myself. I am a hero and I never forget it.' "

And for the third time Silvain said, "No, my lady, I did not win the lady Clarissa. I did not deliver her. There was a man before me, her own knight, Sir Louis Bonivard. I had only to guide them here."

That startled her. She stared at him incredulous. "Bonivard?" she repeated. "One of the Bonivards of Geneva? The girl had him for her lover! And you brought them here? Now, why?"

Silvain smiled. "Why, I trusted the lord Lodovico to be ready to guard his frontier. And ready he was."

Beatrice laughed. "Yes, Lodovico is ready. That is his way. But I do not think he was ready for this. What is she like, your Clarissa?"

"She is a gracious lady and brave."

"Is that all? Poor wench, what a portrait! If that were the best of her I could understand. But I would not trust you to know whether a woman is black or white. Come, let us see the lass and her lad." She clapped her hands for a servant and gave orders that Clarissa and Bonivard should be brought to sup with her and glided out of the room.

When she came back she was mighty fine in a low dress of crimson with sapphires in her yellow hair, at her girdle and in a star upon her bosom. She made Silvain give his arm to her down the stairs, and so together they came into the hall where Bonivard and Clarissa waited looking like two children, and shabby children, before her studied beauty and her splendours. For Clarissa was slight and small and dark, a graceful, pretty girl, but outshone into insignificance by the maturity and the glowing colour of the older woman, and Bonivard had the awkwardness of youth and no skill to hide that he was ill at ease.

Beatrice chose to make the worst of them. She was all condescension, all sympathy, and so contrived that they should show how nervous they were, how uncomfortable in the elaborate luxury of Binasco. Not a word, not a look of mockery came from her, and yet Silvain knew well enough that she was mocking them and him and having no recourse could only hope that Clarissa did not know.

Bonivard put an end to it. "You will pardon us,

my lady," he started up. "It is late and in the morrow we have far to go."

Beatrice smiled. "That is true, sir. You have very far to go. And you must start to-morrow? Well, it is your choice. If I do not see you again, I wish you a pleasant journey."

Clarissa made a shy curtsy and out they went.

"And you, sir, Beatrice turned to Silvain, "will vou go with them?"

"I think they do not need me."

"Fie, how can you forsake her!"

"And I hope that the lord Lodovico has other ventures of honour for me."

"By God, it is very possible!" she cried. "Well, he will be here to-morrow."

And in the morning early Silvain heard trumpets sound and saw Lodovico ride in with a guard, tired men on tired horses, travel-stained. Silvain dressed himself quickly and made for the warden's tower. A man-at-arms stood sentry at the foot of the stair, but he was taken up to the council chamber. It was empty and he had long to wait, and then came not Lodovico but Beatrice, Beatrice in a loose gown with a golden plait hanging over each shoulder to her bosom.

"And what do you want of my lord that you are in such haste to seek him?" she looked at Silvain curiously. "Greedy dogs come scurrying when they hear the master's step. But to give you justice, there is no greed in you."

"You have always given me more than justice. I am come to tell him what I have done."

"He knows, my friend. Lodovico always knows. But wait and see him. He is well pleased with you."

Lodovico came in, bathed and perfumed, in a loose gown like his wife's and, indeed, not unlike a woman in spite of his leanness. For he came with little mincing steps, he held out both hands and took Silvain's and

patted them, his voice was soft and caressing: "It is good to see you, Silvain. The sun shines on me this morning. Forgive us, you find us like homely folk. But I could not wait for ceremony when they told me it was you. And she"—he smiled upon his wife—"she is so full of you I am jealous, I promise you. You are her hero, her paladin. There, sit down, man, and let me hear you tell your tale." But he did not wait to hear, he went on talking. "By my faith, I cannot blame her. It was a miracle, a master stroke. I——"

"And Pavia is ours to-day," said Beatrice quietly.

"Yours, my lord?" Silvain said.

"Oh, that was Ercole's part. He came down upon the rogues that hunted you and drove them helter-skelter. The old knave Carlo had sent the best of his men out after you. There was fortune! Who could have counted on that? I vow you bring me luck, Silvain."

"I think you counted on it, my lord. You had an army ready."

"My friend, it was to save you if you were in danger. I praise God that they were in time to bring you off. But indeed God has ruled all for good."

"Ercole broke into Pavia, my lord?"

"Yes, oh, yes. He beat those fellows who hunted you and chased them and came into the town on their heels. And——"

"And he had infantry behind him to hold fast what he won. You thought of everything, my lord."

Lodovico rubbed his hands. "It has gone well, it has gone well," he chuckled. "But let me hear your story. You were magnificent."

"Not I, my lord. It is Louis Bonivard who delivered the lady," and Silvain told of the rescue, making Bonivard the hero.

"By my honour, it is a romance, a love story!" Lodovico chuckled. "And so you give him the lady, Silvain?"

"She has given herself, my lord. I have no right in her."

"Now that is noble," Lodovico purred. "That is the grand gesture. I hope he is worth it! What manner of man is he, this Bonivard?"

"An oaf," said Beatrice. "A calf in love."

Lodovico laughed. "A true Swiss soldier boy! It is wonderful what a nose the rogues have for a purse. Oh, Silvain, Silvain, here is an end to romance."

"He is a simple, honest gentleman, my lord. What will you do with him?"

"I? Oh, my friend, I have nothing for him. What does he want?"

"As I think, he wants nothing but his lady. But Pavia is hers."

"Surely, surely. She will hold Pavia as a fief of Milan. She is in my wardship. I shall be ready to marry her to a man who can give me loyal service." He sighed and shook his head. "Why should I hide it, Silvain? I hoped that man would be you. It is why I sent you on this venture. And you have done well and more than well. You have won her. Why not wear her?"

"Bonivard," said Silvain. "She is all for Bonivard." And he looked keenly at Lodovico. "I do not take another man's woman."

"She has a rich inheritance," Lodovico purred. "She is worth taking. Who is lord of Pavia and stands by me will be a great man in Italy in the war that comes. When I march with the King of France on Florence and Naples the lord of Pavia has much to win."

"I ride to win honour and fortune," Silvain said, and he looked at Lodovico and looked down. "But she lives for Bonivard."

"What is Bonivard?" Beatrice cried. "My page is more of a man. If she is worth anything, she is worth something better."

"You tempt me," said Silvain in a low voice. "But

what of Bonivard? He troubles me." He started up and paced moodily to and fro: Beatrice and Lodovico looked at each other, and his dark face smiled and she shrugged her shoulders and nodded and turned with a sneer on her lip to watch Silvain.

"The fair Clarissa lives for Bonivard," Lodovico purred. "It is unfortunate. But she is young and he will not live for ever." Silvain checked and turned. "Men do not live for ever in prison. Men who are in the way."

Silvain's sword flashed. He struck down at Lodovico's head, struck once and with the flat of the blade. He whirled round on Beatrice, "Make no sound, do not stir," he said, "or this is his death." And as he spoke Lodovico slipped from his chair and slid to the floor in a heap. "All is well, lady," Silvain said gently. "This is only a swoon yet. But my sword has a point too. Do what I bid or it finds his heart. Open the door to that inner room." She looked at him a moment and she was as pale as he, then glided across the room and flung the door wide. Silvain saw an empty bed-chamber. "Halt there," he said, and gathered Lodovico in his arms and strode past her and laid the senseless man on the bed. "Lady, you must call a servant, you must tell him that Louis Bonivard and his Clarissa are to be given horses and set free to go where they will. This you will say in the council chamber and there you will stay. For I shall be here by the lord Lodovico until they are safe beyond the castle and if you give the alarm here in your bed he dies."

"And what then, fool?" she said in a low voice. "What shall save you then?"

"What will save you, lady? For I have many devices yet. I might kill you too. I might swear that you bade me kill him."

"You would not dare!" she cried. But she looked at him and saw that only his lips were smiling and his

eyes cold and fierce. "My God, you have no shame. This is a dastard's trick."

"Let it be what it will. I do not care for myself nor for you. I think of the two you sent me to betray. Do as I bid you, go."

She looked at him again and glided out of the room and he stood on guard over Lodovico. After a moment he heard her clap her hands and call a servant and send for the seneschal and then: "Oh, you are slow, Roderigo, you are slow. My lord bids you set the Swiss knight and his lady free. Give them their horses and let them go. See to it quickly."

Her dress rustled into the bed-chamber again. She came to Silvain, she looked at his set stern face, she looked down at her husband and touched his brow. "His soul is still in his body," Silvain said. "You have served him well."

She turned away and went to the window. In a while the sound of horses came from the courtyard. She held out her hand and beckoned to Silvain. He came to her side and saw Bonivard and Clarissa mount and ride out and away.

She drew a long breath, she turned to Silvain and smiled. "Well, my knight-errant? And now?"

Silvain put up his sword. "It is finished," he said.

"Oh, but you had many devices. Come, what device have you now? You may kill him yet before help comes. You may kill me too. Be swift!"

"I promised you his life for theirs. He is safe."

"You are wise!" she sneered. "Here are a hundred men to beat you down when they find my lord is stricken."

"That I know well. I stand here to die."

"Oh, you are humble at last. You will kneel and ask mercy now."

"Not I. I ask nothing. You and your lord, you sent me out to bring a woman into your power. You tempted me to betray her and my friend. Well, I have

saved them, but you made me strike down a naked man to do it and threaten his wife with death and shame. You have made me play the dastard to beat you. I thank you. I ask nothing of you."

"You have saved them!" she said and she laughed. "He saves others, himself he cannot save. By God, you shall take something of me. Go with your life, go." She swept out, she called down the stair, "Ho, there! Sir Silvain's horses! Swift, swift!"

Silvain stood a moment, then strode forward and met her face to face. He knelt and kissed her hand. "Forgive me, lady, I have done you a wrong in my heart. It is you who have the honour of the day and I am shamed."

But she laughed. "Oh, fool, fool!" she said, and the echo of her laughter was with him as he went.

CHAPTER XXIX

SILVAIN LOOKS BACK

MESSIRE THIBAUT, fidgeting for fear in the courtyard, was more afraid when he saw his master's face. For once in his life Messire Thibaut dared not speak. Their horses were brought and they mounted and rode out of that castle of Binasco and Thibaut crossed himself and muttered prayers, but Silvain dashed on as fast as his horse could gallop.

"He rides like a man who flees from hell," Thibaut communed with himself, "and like a man who has been in hell he looks. Pity me, where is he taking me now?"

For at the first cross-roads Silvain struck off to the east away from Milan and still drove his horse on till Thibaut cried out. "Have mercy, lord. We cannot hold this pace." But Silvain made him no answer nor checked. After a while they saw Bonivard and Clarissa ahead, and Bonivard looked back and when he saw who they were drew rein. But Silvain shouted at him, "Forward, forward, make your best speed, forward!" and when he came up with them, "By my faith, you must do better than this, Louis. You should have been twenty miles away. Forward, forward!"

"What now?" cried Bonivard. "Are they hunting us again?"

"Be sure of it," Silvain said. "Every man Lodovico can mount."

"This is mad," Bonivard stared at him. "When I called for my horse this morning they said I was a prisoner and I found a guard at my door. Then they told me we were free to go and brought our horses and

opened the gates. Now you say the man means to capture us again. Why, he changes like a weathercock."

"It was not Lodovico who set you free. It was the lady Beatrice of her mercy. For she is noble and gracious. But when Lodovico knows of it he will use all his strength to seize you. And I think by now he knows. Ride, ride!"

"Lodovico did not know? How should he not know?"

"That was a trick I played upon him, and a shameful trick. God in heaven, must we talk? Your lady is free to-day. See to it she is free to-morrow. That is your work."

Bonivard's honest face lowered. "I do not understand!" he grumbled. "It was you who brought us to Lodovico. You are his man. And now, if this is true, you have betrayed him."

"God in heaven, I know it," Silvain cried. "I am shamed, do what I will. But you"—he looked at Bonivard—"by my faith, it is not you who should tell me so."

Then Clarissa cried out, "Oh, my lord, you have no shame in this."

"Let it be," Silvain said. "I do as I can."

So they rode on in silence, through the hot Italian noon. Bonivard had chosen the road which strikes across the plain to the passes beyond Turin, the shortest way to the mountains for a man who dared not go by Milan. "When we are in the hills we are safe," he said, but the hills were far away.

Having made a dozen miles from the castle, Silvain was content to ride a slower pace. "We have something in hand, I hope. Now let us nurse the horses and keep it." But they had ridden their horses out before he would halt. It was a squalid lonely village which received them. As soon as they had found quarters, he took Messire Thibaut to seek fresh horses. The village had nothing but oxen and mules. "It is as well as it is,

lord," Thibaut shrugged. "We could do no more this day. The woman must rest or she will die."

"Lodovico will not rest," Silvain said.

"But his horses can do no more than our horses," Thibaut protested.

Silvain did not argue it. He knew what he would do if he were Lodovico, send messengers to every town in his rule to set mounted men scouring all the roads to Switzerland. He looked for fresh pursuit from every side.

Back to the stable he went and used his horsemaster's skill on the weary beasts, and through the night Thibaut and he kept watch and watch, and before the dawn he roused Bonivard and Clarissa and they took the road again.

In the morning twilight they saw the walls of a town and shunned it, striking away across country to join the road beyond, and this they did safely, though it was slow work over the sodden fields, and their caution was justified. For they came out upon the road again beyond a picket of horsemen who shouted a challenge.

Silvain turned in the saddle and saw Lodovico's colours. "Peace be with you," he cried. "We are the Duke of Savoy's men. We ride to Turin." That held the horsemen a moment, who talked together, and again shouted to them to halt. "Now ride, brother, ride!" Silvain said and dashed on.

They rode lighter than those men-at-arms, they were better mounted, though their horses were jaded and they kept their lead. But the men-at-arms rode hard and a troop thundered on behind them.

Bonivard ranged alongside Silvain. "They will ride us down in the end," he muttered. "What hope is there if Lodovico takes us again?"

"There is none for you or me, brother. For her, I cannot tell."

"If I am to die I will die fighting," said Bonivard.

Silvain smiled. "I shall be with you, brother. We will turn on them together and hold them some little while. It may be she will win free, God be kind to her."

"What are you saying?" Clarissa cried.

"Ride, lady, ride," Silvain said. "You must not be taken for our honour's sake."

"Give me your dagger, Louis," she cried. "I will not be taken alive."

Bonivard came to her side and loosed his dagger and she put it in her bosom. "Live while I live," he said.

"Oh, it is cruel, it is cruel!" she cried.

They were riding through a flat country of many rivers, there was no hope in turning off the road, and the road lay straight and the men-at-arms held on behind in close order.

In a little while they saw a cloud of dust ahead and as they drew nearer it broke in gleams of steel.

"My God, here is the end," Bonivard groaned. "We are taken now. Come, my lord," and he checked his horse to turn.

But Silvain cried, "Ride on, man, ride. These are not Milanese. I see the golden lilies." And he stood in his stirrups and shouted, "France! France!"

For through the dust came a gleam of the French banner. An order rang out, the squadron halted, the lances came down to the charge, a knight rode out alone. "Who are you that come upon us?" He held up his hand. "Halt there!"

But Silvain dashed on and "Bayard!" he cried.

"God's grace, you are Silvain de St. Lo. In a good hour, my lord."

"Silvain I am. And it is God who brought you, my brother. Here is a lady hunted for her life. Let her pass and guard her, I pray you."

"Why, you bring me honour," Bayard turned and called to his men.

Through the French lances Clarissa and Bonivard

rode on and the ranks closed behind them, and the Milanese horsemen seeing that rampart of steel bar their way checked and halted in disorder.

Bayard called to them, "Who are you that ride against the banner of France? Go your way, I clear this road for King Charles."

Then the captain of Lodovico's men cried out, "We are friends of France. We serve the lord of Milan. He has sent us to take these rogues we hunt. Give us them, sir, and you will do your King good service. For my lord Lodovico is his friend, you know it well."

"I do not know you," said Bayard. "But this I know. You have hunted a fair lady and this good knight of France. And now you stand in my way and I lead the vanguard of King Charles." He turned in his saddle. "Advance, banner," he shouted. "In close order. Charge!"

But Lodovico's men did not wait for the word. They turned and made off at speed.

"You have saved me, brother," Silvain said. "But I have brought trouble on you."

"Good faith, here is none," Bayard laughed.

"The King comes to join with Lodovico. And Lodovico will not forgive this day's work. He hunted this lady and her knight because he has stolen her inheritance. He hunted me because I saved them. And he is venomous."

"Why, man, what care I? I have done right. Do not fear for me. Bayard can guard himself."

"Be wary, brother. Your King is allied to a fiend. I would to God I could ride with you. Fare you well."

Bayard stopped his horse. "You must go guard the lady? So be it. But come back to us, Silvain. Here is a fair field of honour and no better knight of us all than you."

"I dare not," Silvain said hoarsely. "Oh, my brother, I would give my life and be glad to ride under the golden lilies with you. But you go to serve

Lodovico, you and France. There is no honour in that, Bayard."

He turned his horse and rode after Clarissa and Bonivard. Messire Thibaut was waiting for him, Messire Thibaut had set them on by a cross-road which climbed up towards Novara and the hills and he caught them up where they rode close, chattering like children. Clarissa turned to him and took him into their talk prettily, all happiness, and they could not make enough of him.

"But your eyes are behind you," she cried at last. "Oh, my lord, is there danger for us yet?"

"We are safe enough," Silvain said.

"See the sun on the snows, Clarissa," Bonivard cried. "We shall be in the mountains to-morrow."

"There is only sunshine before us," she smiled. "But why do you look back, Silvain?"

Silvain pointed down the road in the plain. It gleamed in a long array of steel. "See, there is the army of France marching to war, and a knight of France am I and I may not ride under her banner nor fight for her. I am a lonely man and my heart is desolate."

CHAPTER XXX

SIR GILBERT AND SIR PHILIBERT

THE sun was setting, the peaks of the Apennines rose dark into a sky of flame and the plain lay in golden light. Silvain came by the road under the foothills singing his evening psalm. "An offering of a free heart will I give thee and praise thy name, O Lord, because it is so comfortable. For He hath delivered me out of all my trouble——"

Men ran upon him from a hollow in the hills and caught his bridle and bade him stand.

"—and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies," Silvain made an end of his psalm and drew his sword and a hundred yards behind Messire Thibaut gave a howl and charged to help. "Here is nothing for you but steel," said Silvain mildly. "Who has a lust to die."

There were half a dozen about him, sturdy rascals, armed with dagger and sword, and they laughed at him. "Put up your iron, my master. If you strike, it is you who go down. We are many on one and as many more as you need."

"I do not doubt you," Silvain smiled. "But consider. If I go down some of you will go down with me. It is not worth while for me or for you." He was still speaking when he drove spurs into his horse and struck at the hands on the bridle and the horse plunged and broke from them and Thibaut rode into the midst and drove a way through.

But Silvain turned and halted as soon as he was clear. "Whose men are you?" he cried. "I am Silvain de St. Lo."

The one man grumbled in French, "Blood of God, he is a Frenchman!" and they made off.

"By my faith, this is not to end so," Silvain said and rode after them. "Bring me to your master."

They stared back at him, bewildered and sulky, but led on through the folds of the hills and Silvain followed close. And he put on his helmet and took his shield from where it hung behind him and rode on ready with naked sword.

"Now will I make a good end, as the bull said when he tossed the butcher's boy and ran into the slaughter-house," quoth Messire Thibaut.

In a little way they saw men riding on the hill-side who halted as they were seen and one shouted, "How now, Jacques? Who do you bring me? Or is it he who brings you? The devil take you, you come like driven sheep." He too spoke French.

"Sir, are you the shepherd of these sheep?" Silvain cried.

"'Ware wolf, lad, 'ware wolf!" the answer came with an oath.

"I am Silvain de St. Lo."

The other stared and rode forward, lifting his hand in salute. "Body of God, you are welcome. I am Gilbert du Marais. What have you brought us, brother?"

"A sword, sir. Your men stopped me on the road and I seek their master. I pray you choose your ground. There is light enough yet for us to prove ourselves."

Gilbert laughed. "I like that. That is the right stuff. But no, thank you, I will not fight you, not I. Dog does not hunt dog. We are Frenchmen both."

"Sir? I am sorry for it."

"Peace, lad, peace. Here is no fair fighting. Silvain de St. Lo is a better sword than I. I know it and the devil knows I am in no haste to die. But look you, if you make an end of me, here are men enough who will

have your blood for mine. No, child, I will not let you run upon death. Come, what is your quarrel with me? They stopped you on the road? It is their trade, the dogs. Why, they took you for one of these Italian city soldiers who are all money and no sword. What are we here for but to shear the sheep of Italy? But the devil burn me, the lads were blind not to know a knight of France. I ask your pardon, Silvain, and there is an end." He held out his hand.

"If you please," Silvain said, and took it, and Messire Thibaut was heard to give a great sigh.

"Good fellow!" Gilbert cried. "Come on with me and I will show you merry cheer. Body of God, it warms my heart to have Silvain de St. Lo of our company."

In this manner Silvain met Gilbert du Marais, who brought him to Philibert de la Vire, which made for him the best day of his life and the worst.

Where the hills rise towards the mountains they came in the twilight to the ruins of a castle. From a shapeless mound of fallen stone the black walls rose broken and jagged. But Gilbert kept his word. He had good quarters and good cheer. Though the castle hall was covered with a low roof of planks and shut in by a patchwork of curtains, something between a hut and a tent, it had rich furniture and plate and the tables were laden with spiced meats and all the wines of Lombardy.

"Do we not live like kings, brother?" Gilbert chuckled with his mouth full of ortolan, and Silvain said that King Charles had no better fare.

"He has worse, I swear," said Philibert de la Vire. "Well, a man must take what he earns."

Silvain was sitting between them and he looked from one to the other. Gilbert spread himself, a loose-made careless fellow, taking his pleasure of the moment, and there was nothing to be seen in his red face but sensual good will. His cousin Philibert was a little man, low of brow and cunning of eye, greedy in his ways, but

finding no satisfaction, like a peasant driving a bargain, a hard little man and gloomy.

Silvain asked him if he had news of the King and the army of France. "Devil a word have I heard," said Gilbert, and drank to French swords and King Charles.

"And God send him a horse with a good wind." said Philibert.

"What, sir? Is the army in retreat? I did not know that."

"Nor did I. But I can guess. If a man goes rabbiting where wasps nest, he will soon be running."

"Drink again, cousin," Gilbert laughed and passed the wine along. "See your luck through the wine, it is none so black."

"Nor is the King's," said Silvain. "He has won many a victory and none stand against him."

"What has he won?" Philibert growled. "Glory and smoke, poor loon, glory and smoke."

Gilbert chuckled. Silvain stared. "Sir, you make me wonder," he said. "If you think the King is in danger why do you linger here? If you fear the venture that he has chosen, why did you come so far?"

"And you may wonder," Philibert's little eyes twinkled. "There are many things you will wonder in this world, Sir Silvain. Men are not all fools."

Gilbert struck in quickly to make peace. Between more wine and gross stories and coarse songs Silvain heard some of Gilbert's philosophy. Italy was a devilish good country if a man knew how to use it. But that way was not the King's way of marching with an army. Nothing in that but glory and smoke, as cousin Philibert said. But a brisk company watching the high roads could make a duke's ransom every week. No such country as Italy for fat merchants' caravans and fine lords and ladies who had guards that would not fight. Why then, no such country for lusty Frenchmen.

The two cousins and their men, it emerged from Gilbert's chatter, had marched into Italy with King

Charles, meaning to grow rich by a war of plunder. When they found that the King was engaged on a military display they withdrew from the army and made a private war on the travellers of Lombardy. And thus they throve in safety. While the French King was parading his arms all down Italy the Italian cities dared not squander men to go fighting a band of soldiers of fortune. If the King got into trouble and had to retreat, Sir Gilbert and Sir Philibert were so near the mountains that they could be off to France with his vanguard.

"It is a neat thing, lad, it is a neat thing," Gilbert clapped Silvain on the shoulder. "Do you want your share? Why, we have done well, but the devil doubt we should do better with a knight like Silvain in our company. There are pretty ventures, you rogue. And booty enough for three. I do not grudge you, not I."

"Sir, I ride on," Silvain said.

Philibert laughed. "That is his life. He rides on."

"Not to-night, lad," said Gilbert, and poured more wine for him and struck up another song.

They sat late and again and again Gilbert plied him with offers to join them. It became clear to Silvain that there was some reason why he should not be allowed to go away. He yawned and asked leave to sleep.

Gilbert took a man and a lantern and led him among the ruins to a tower which was still sound. "We lie here and there in this old place," he explained, as they climbed the stair, "but this is good quarters, lad." He held up the lantern in a room which had much furniture. "This was a pretty lady's bower," he chuckled. "Dream of her, Silvain." He set down the lantern and went off singing a ribald song as Thibaut came with their gear.

"There is good wine in this place, lord," Messire Thibaut grinned and yawned and stretched himself on the floor. "God make me as full to-morrow. Amen."

But Silvain put down the lantern on the table so that

no light showed and went to the window. He saw a man take post at the door of the tower on guard.

Then he turned and said, "Do not sleep, brother," and Thibaut groaned. Silvain watched that man on guard till he had his measure and then lay down on the floor by Thibaut and with his lips at Thibaut's ear, "Is there a watch on the horses?" he whispered.

"One man watches the horse lines."

Silvain went back to the window and listened till all was quiet. Then he stole down the stair. The sentry was lounging in the doorway. He heard something, turned and heard nothing, for Silvain stood still hidden in the curve of the stairway, and turned again to lounge. A fist in an iron gauntlet grasped his mouth and a dagger hilt struck his temple. He was stunned and senseless without a sound. Silvain carried him up and tied him in a bundle of bedclothes.

They took their gear and made for the horse lines. As soon as they saw through the darkness dark shapes in rank Messire Thibaut dropped down flat with the turf and crept on. Silvain stopped and found a stone and threw it. One of the horses plunged and kicked. The sentry ran to quiet it. While he was busy Thibaut came near and rising suddenly behind him brought him to the ground with a cloak over his head. Silvain ran in and the man was tied up in the heel ropes with a peg to bite on. And they saddled and made off.

"Pity me," Thibaut groaned. "What is all this, lord?"

"Gilbert did not tell me, brother," Silvain laughed. "But I think that he will."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LORD OF MANTUA

WITH the stars for a guide they made their way back to the road, and there Thibaut slept and Silvain watched till dawn. As soon as he had light enough to see far he took Thibaut and the horses and hid them in a fold of the hills and himself chose a place on the high ground whence he could watch the way to the castle.

He had not long to wait. Gilbert and Philibert came with all their company and came in haste. "All these for me, friend?" Silvain said. "You do me too much honour." Philibert went on and reconnoitred while the rest halted. Then they moved forward slowly. The mass of them went into hiding in the broken ground by the road. Men on foot scattered on either side of it and lay down. Two or three horsemen spurred southward some way and vanished. "Alas, it is not for me," said Silvain. "This is the secret venture that would be spoilt if I rode away with news of it. But I did ride away and still he ventures. A brave Gilbert! Well, you have laid a pretty ambush. Who is to fall into it, Gilbert? Fare you well, I go to see." He stole down to the horses and Thibaut and they mounted and worked round among the hills till they came on the road far to southward and out of sight of the sentries of Gilbert.

But they had come too far. Between them and the ambush a long train of horsemen with baggage mules and litters was going leisurely on to destruction. Silvain galloped after it holding up his hand. It halted, a knight came out from it and met him. "Who is your

captain?" Silvain cried. "I am Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of France."

"I am the captain of the guard of my lord of Mantua. Do you come from the King of France?"

Silvain saw the wrinkled scarred face of an old soldier of fortune look at him cunningly. "I come from myself. My news is that you are in danger."

The Mantuan looked round at his men-at-arms and laughed.

"Sir, you know what you have with you that is worth taking. I know that three miles away there is an ambush laid to take it. There are forty men against you. If you can break through, go your way and God be with you. I have done my part."

The Mantuan pulled his lip. "Forty?" he said. "Frenchmen?"

"God made the French, sir. The devil made them rogues."

The Mantuan looked along the road, looked at the broken ground, and made up his mind. "Good thanks, sir. I go back," and he shouted orders. But in the midst of them a woman's voice called him. He made a grimace. "Come, sir, tell your tale, I pray you," he said and brought Silvain to a litter borne by mules.

Its curtains were drawn back. The woman in it had raised herself on her cushions. Silvain saw a dainty face made piquant by the mocking curve of the mouth. It would have been fragile but for the breadth of brow. It would have been too fair but for the violet darkness of the eyes. "Why do we loiter, Taddeo?" she said and looked at Silvain.

"Here is a French knight come to tell there is a French ambush set for us. I turn back, my lady."

"Why does he forsake his friends to serve me?" Her eyes were steady on Silvain.

"They are no friends of mine who bring shame on France," Silvain answered. "For the honour of France I must save you, lady."

"And so for the honour of France I am to run away. I thank you, sir. Do you know who I am?"

"I know that you are a woman." Silvain bowed. "That commands all of me."

"I am Isabella d'Este, sir," she cried. And Silvain smiled as he bowed again, for he understood the anxieties of Gilbert and Philibert. Isabella d'Este was as great a lady as any in Italy and the wife of the Marquis of Mantua, a potent prince and a soldier of fame. She would be a splendid capture. The man who had her to sell might ask what he chose of Italy or France.

But she was not pleased with that smile. "Oh, you are merry! It is a jest that I cannot come to my own city but must turn and run from your French brigands."

"By my faith, I do not bid you turn back. I say there are forty men in ambush to capture you. Here are more than forty with you. If they have heart for it they may break through and bring you on. But if you do not trust them it is time to turn and be gone."

She looked at Taddeo, but he shook his cautious head. "My lady, I dare not bring you into danger. I have to answer for you to your lord."

"You shall answer for it if you turn back," she cried. "I go on, Taddeo, I go on if I go alone. March, sirrah."

"Oh, lady, you are too bold," Silvain laughed. "Here is only one captain and that is not you." He saluted to Taddeo. "At your orders, sir." And he drew away from her, making Taddeo's horse move too. "Now let us order it."

"What the devil am I to do with her?" Taddeo muttered. "You see what she is."

"Let her stay where she is," Silvain said. "Leave a dozen men and the rest of us try our fortune. If it goes ill they can bring her off. But I think it will not go ill."

"The men are well enough," said Taddeo. "They will fight out a fight. But there is no fire in them, and your Frenchmen are devils."

The end of that talk was that they left the angry lady on the road and marched on with most of the baggage. Taddeo and all his unmounted men, who had pikes and swords, and the baggage and some of the horsemen kept the road. Silvain picked out a dozen who were young and well mounted and led them off by the way he had come through the hills.

So the sentries of Gilbert and Philibert saw at last the expected Mantuan company. It marched with a couple of horsemen ahead, a guard of horsemen in the rear, and in the midst a long train of mules and litters with pikemen marching on either side. There beyond doubt was the lady Isabella. The first horsemen were suffered to pass. When the mule train came Gilbert and Philibert broke out of ambush. The pikemen were ready, turned and stood shoulder to shoulder, a line of spears on either side the litters.

"Away, you sheep," Gilbert roared as he charged. "Break them, break in." And Philibert and he and one or two more charged through the spears, but the most of his men, unarmoured, flinched from the steady line or could not break it.

Then came a shout from their rear, "Mantua! Mantua!" and the thunder of galloping horses, and while they wondered and faltered and turned bewildered what this might be, from the ground where they had lain in ambush fresh men charged on them, shouting, "Mantua! Mantua!"

That was the end of Gilbert's company. It reeled and broke, and the cautious Taddeo came up and flung in his reserve to sweep it away. Scattered into single horsemen, leaving many fallen on the road, it fled back into the hills.

Silvain halted and took off his helmet. "I wonder if he knew me, the brave Gilbert?" he smiled.

Taddeo's trumpet sounded the rally. Taddeo was in a hurry to form his column again and be off. The lady and her guard were brought up, he gave the word to

march and rode beside her. "Rest at ease, my lady. There is no more to fear of them. They are broken men. It went hard for a while, but I have my pikes well drilled and they stood to it till I could develop my tactic. Then the thing was done. The truth is they have no science, these Frenchmen. They are bold in the charge, but they do not know how to order a fight."

"Where is our Frenchman?" said the lady.

"Oh, he is gone on with the advance guard. It is a wild youth," Taddeo smiled indulgently, "he must wear out many a horse. He ranges to and fro like a dog. But I do not fear to trust him."

"That is gracious," said the lady. "Then you will give me leave to speak with him? Bid him come."

But Silvain did not come. He was resolved that the lady should fall into no other ambush and he rode far ahead of Taddeo's stolid column, searching the ground. It was not till the walls of Mantua were in sight that he halted beside the road and waited for her litter. From the town where her family ruled a troop was riding out to meet her. Taddeo saw it and barked out orders that set his men dressing their ranks and marching stiffly.

Silvain and Thibaut, sitting at ease on their tired horses, watched the column go by. When the golden litter came Silvain drew his sword and saluted the lady. She did not see him at first for she lay back on the cushions and Taddeo was riding at her side. Then she raised herself on her elbow. "Bid them halt, Taddeo," she cried and beckoned to Silvain. "Why do you sit there like a statue, my friend?" she said. "I bade you come to me long ago."

"I am your servant, lady. I was watching the road. And here the road ends. I pray you give me leave to kiss your hand."

"Forward, Taddeo," she signed to him to let Silvain come to her. The column began to move. "And what is your road, my friend?"

"I go my way to seek honour."

She smiled. "There is none by my side?"

"By my faith, I am proud that I ride here."

"Yes, you are proud," she said, considering him. "I also have some pride, my friend. You have brought me safe out of a vile danger. What shall I give you for that?"

"I pray you, give me your hand to kiss."

A man came riding fast down the column, a sturdy fellow in a rich array of blue and red and gold. He bowed low to the lady and swung his horse round to her. "My heart gives you welcome," he cried. Silvain reined back and gave him place beside her.

"It is good to come," she said softly and their eyes spoke together.

"Each day that I wait for you is a longer day."

"I have had the longer days to bear." They smiled at each other and then she turned from him. "I come late. Sir, I have had a war to fight to come to you. I should not be here for you to-night but by this French lord's grace." She made him look back at Silvain. "He has delivered me out of the hand of the French. My lord Marquis, this is Sir Silvain de St. Lo. I pray you honour him for my sake, who indeed deserves all honour for his own."

The Marquis bowed. "Sir, I have heard of many deeds of Silvain de St. Lo and envied him. I am proud to stand in his debt."

"Here is no debt, my lord. To serve your lady would be service that pays itself richly. But what I could do was little matter. She was her own captain," Silvain smiled.

"I think it is no little matter that a knight of France should ride against Frenchmen. Sir, you had a hard choice. You have chosen like a noble knight. But we are fortunate."

So they brought him to Modena and made him their guest in the palace and showed him stately courtesy. The place was full of princelings and their gentle-

men and their captains, and many eyes looked askance at the Frenchman. But the Marquis of Mantua had the will to see that his pleasure was law.

"By St. Tringan this Marquis sets a value on us!" said Messire Thibaut, who throve on palace fare. "Surely he has some great thing for us, lord?"

"I fear it, brother," Silvain smiled.

Before a week was out it came. He was beckoned out of the company in the great hall of audience to the room where the Marquis sat alone. "We have seen too little of you in these busy days, sir. Believe that you have been often in my mind."

"Sir, you have been too kind to me."

"I have done nothing. You did for me what a man does not forget. Sir Silvain, I think you are bound to no lord."

"It is true. I am my own man."

"I should count myself happy if you would ride with me. I go upon a great venture, sir. I take command of the armies of a league to save Italy."

Silvain drew a long breath. "From the King of France, my lord?" he said.

"Yes. As you saved my wife from his brigands, I hope that I may save Italy from him."

"My King is no brigand, my lord."

"I judge him by his acts. The work he has done in Italy is brigand's work. He snatches at our towns, he claims lordship of our lands, he seeks to make himself a realm in our country. Your King? Why, you cannot serve such a King. You know it."

"I am a knight of France, my lord. To France I must be loyal, or I am nothing."

"His cause is no cause for you, Silvain. You know it well. You have been long in Italy. You do not ride with him. You have to fight against the rogues who march under his banner. Come, fight with me and deliver the land from evil. Is it a good cause? Your heart knows."

Silvain smiled sadly. "What should I answer you, my lord? I think your heart knows that."

"What has he brought upon Italy? Rapine and death and outrage for men and women who had done him no wrong. We gather and march to defend our right. God is for us. He cannot stand against us, this robbers' king. But the fight will go hard and we need every knight's aid. Come, Silvain, here is honour to win."

"Not for me, my lord," Silvain said. "If all you say is true, why, then my place is now with the King."

"No, by God's grace. You would not march with him to plunder us. It is not for you to defend him when we rally to take vengeance."

"By my faith, it is in that day I must fight for him. I had no part in his victories. I dare not stand aside if he marches on defeat."

"Why, this is mad loyalty. You will take the wrong cause because it goes to ruin."

Silvain looked up. "Is that mad, my lord? I think your heart does not say so. I am a knight of France, and if France has evil days I must bear my part."

"Go your way, you have chosen," the Marquis said. "God guide you, Silvain." And Silvain went out with bowed head.

That night there came to him servants who brought him armour of Milan steel and a gold chain worked in the cipher of the lady Isabella, and he was told that my lord had ordered two chargers to be stabled with his.

Then Messire Thibaut chuckled and rubbed his hands. "This is a noble lord. He means to set us up on high."

"Noble he is, brother," Silvain smiled. "For he arms me against himself."

The jaw of Thibaut fell and he groaned. "You turn against him? Alas, my bones, we never had fortune

yet but Silvain must seek a way to lose it. What irks you here? This lord has been gentle and gracious, a sweet lord, and I will go bail for him he is one to trust."

"Oh, brother, he is the noblest prince that ever I knew. But he marches against the army of France and I must turn my sword upon him and be his enemy."

"Why?" said Thibaut. "France never gave you anything that you should lose all for her. Look, lord. France has sent her army to the devil, but you did not choose to go with them. Then why the devil go after them now?"

"France is our mother," Silvain said.

"Pity poor me," Thibaut moaned. "Oh, Silvain, my lord, you have an uncomfortable soul. When you go to heaven you will turn upon God to fight for the poor souls in hell."

But Silvain had his way, and so nobly armed and mounted they rode out from Modena in the dawn and made southward to find King Charles.

It was a journey that asked some skill. For all the roads had grown busy. People of importance and their escorts were going to and fro between Rome and Florence and Venice and Milan and all these cities and Modena and Mantua. Troops were on the march too, levies of citizens, bands of hired soldiers of fortune, Germans and Swiss as well as Italians, all suspicious, most of them eager for a quarrel or seeking, as Thibaut moaned, what they might devour. But Messire Thibaut quaked too soon, for Silvain found a way through them peaceably, shunning a challenge, giving place rather than give offence, irresistibly meek and supple.

"God have mercy," said Thibaut, "his head is bowed and his mouth is shut and he has no joy. So have I seen a man when the shadow of death fell cold upon him."

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE KING'S TENT

BUT Silvain pushed on fast and came through the Apennines and beyond Pisa, and there in the country by the sea saw the banners of the French army.

He was kneeling by a wayside shrine to give thanks when horsemen rode out from the vanguard and challenged him and brought him to their captain.

A knight who sat tall on a great charger shaded his eyes to look. Silvain cried out, "Bayard!" and galloped on. "I said in my heart that it would be you, brother. There is none but Bayard to lead the vanguard of France."

Bayard grasped at his hand. "Oh, my brother, this should be your place." Silvain shook his head and smiled. "You have been my captain in my heart many a year now. I have prayed often that I might be such a knight as you are."

"God has given you better fortune."

"Richer, not better," Bayard said. "But what now? Tell me, have you come to us at last?"

"At last, that is the word. Yes, I have come to ride under the lilies. I pray you, Bayard, let me serve with you."

"With me?" Bayard laughed. "Where I am there is always a place for you. But the King will need you for something greater."

"I look for no welcome, Bayard. I bring no good news." He lowered his voice. "My fear is that I have come too late."

Bayard stared at him. "This is not like you,

brother," he said. "What fear rides with you that you look so heavily?"

"How is it in the army? Are you strong and in good heart?"

Bayard smiled. "Do not fear for us. Our heads are high and our hearts. By Our Lady, we have a right to go proud. All is won that we marched to win. We have given our King a new realm and wide dominion. Our lord Charles is anointed King of Naples and Emperor of the East and King of Jerusalem. He has put on the robe and crown of Byzant."

"And sovereignty of dreams," Silvain said. "And now you turn back to France. How many men have you left behind, Bayard?"

"There are twelve thousand holding Naples," said Bayard.

Silvain turned in the saddle and looked back down the column of march and crossed himself and murmured a prayer. "Fifty thousand came out of France," he said. "Here are no more than ten thousand. You have left many behind."

"It is true. They wasted away in Naples," Bayard said. "There was a sickness upon us. But many are gone here and there making free companies to seek fortune."

"And plunder Italy. By my faith, this was a noble venture, Bayard, and France has won much honour. For the King is made Emperor of the East and King of Jerusalem. God help him, when will he come to the Holy City? Dreams, dreams!"

"Are you here to speak evil of the King, Sir Silvain?" Bayard cried.

"Not I, brother. I am a knight of France and I ride to him in his need."

"You are gracious. He has won many victories without your sword. There are good swords to serve him yet."

"Bear with me, Bayard. I saw no honour in this

venture. I held off in your victories. Now dangers gather about you I must ride with you. You march with ten thousand men. Beyond the mountains there are fifty thousand marshalled to destroy you and a great captain to lead them, Francesco of Mantua."

Bayard laughed. "Here is a noble fight for France! What, brother, why do you come heavily talking of fear and ill news? This is the best we have heard since we came into Italy. We could find never an army strong enough to prove our swords. God be thanked, here is hope of a deed of arms at last. Come, I must bring you to the King. Do not fear, brother, you will be welcome."

While the army plodded on, King Charles and his courtiers were halted in a great tent to rest through the heat of the day. His Majesty lolled upon cushions drinking wine from a cup half filled with snow.

"It is Bayard, sir," said Etienne de Vesc, the favourite at his elbow. "He brings some stranger."

The King yawned and turned his big head.

"I bring Sir Silvain de St. Lo, my lord." There was some stir in the drowsy company.

The King looked away like a surly child. "I have nothing for him," he mumbled. "He is no knight of mine."

Then Etienne de Vesc said quickly, "Name of God, Bayard, you take your duty lightly. Our vanguard has no captain while you bring your wandering friends to tease us."

"Will you teach Bayard a captain's duty, Sir Etienne?" Bayard said. "My lord, Sir Silvain has great news for you."

"Well, what is it?" the King cried peevishly. "What is it? Speak out and have done."

"Great news it is, my lord," Silvain said. "I dare not call it good news. There is a strong league gathered to give you battle: Venice and Florence and the Pope's men and Mantua and all the states of the north.

Even your friend Lodovico of Milan has turned against you."

"Blood of God," said the Marshal d'Esquerdes, who was the King's second favourite, "I always said that man was a knave."

But Etienne de Vesc cried out, "Fie, this is all known. This is not news. Do you think to win favour by this stale stuff?"

"When was it known? I did not know it," said d'Esquerdes. "Look, my lord, if all this is true we march too slow."

"All this is true and more. The Emperor has sent them men, my lord, Germans and Switzers, and they gather a great host and Francesco of Mantua leads them."

"The Mantuan! Name of God, they have the best captain in Italy," d'Esquerdes cried. "Where do they muster, sir?"

"South of Modena, sir. They gather towards the Apennines. I fear they watch the passes."

"I swear they will. How many men?"

"By my faith, I count them fifty thousand."

"The devil you do!" D'Esquerdes turned to the King. "Do you know what I think, my lord? I think you lie there too long."

The King started up. "March then, march. I do not keep you. By Our Lady, I am not afraid of them, I."

"No, sir, but here are some who fear shadows, or would have you fear," said Etienne de Vesc. "Who is this knight that knows so much of the enemy? Who sent him?"

A loose-made man thrust forward. Silvain saw the red face of Gilbert du Marais grin at him. "I can tell you that, Sir Etienne," Gilbert cried. "This knight spied upon us when we laid an ambush to sieze the lady of Mantua to be a hostage for her lord and brought the Mantuans down upon us and delivered her. But for

him we should have had her safe and my lord of Mantua would not dare to lead his league against France."

"Why, the man is a traitor!" cried Etienne.

"He fights for Mantua, not France. Bear me witness, Philibert." He turned and thrust his cousin forward.

"He fought for the lady," Philibert's little eyes glowered. "He delivered her. He broke our company. He tricked us."

"Look at him!" Gilbert laughed, for Silvain stood pale and silent. "He dares not deny it. He is a Mantuan, no Frenchman."

Silvain flung back his head. "By my faith, I did not think I should live to hear a French knight boast to his King of your deeds. This is true. You did lay an ambush to capture the lady of Mantua and I found it out and delivered her." He turned upon the King. "I pray you, my lord, is this your way of war that you would have your knights lie in wait for a woman and take her to hold her at their will?"

"What do you say?" The King rolled his big head. "I know nothing of it. It is all folly."

"Folly and worse," said Etienne de Vesc. "Here is one who would be on both sides. He fights for Mantua. He comes to tell tales of Mantua. Go your way, sirrah, the King wants no men of two faces."

"Sir," said Bayard, "it was I who brought Sir Silvain to my lord."

Then the Marshal d'Esquerdes cried, "Do you answer for him, Bayard?"

"Sir, his honour is my honour," Bayard said.

The Marshal laughed. "Name of God, Etienne, it will be long before you have such warranty," and the King too cackled laughter. "Hear my mind, my lord. This news is true and I thank God we have it. For we must march and march fast or the rogues will gather and hold the passes against us and we shall be trapped in the mountains and never win out. Name of God,

how can the man be false? He bids us march on to France and march fast and that is right soldierly reason. But if a man says there is nothing to fear and we can wait and take our ease, I hear Italian gold clink in his pockets." He looked with a sneering smile at Etienne and Gilbert. "To the devil with all traitors. This knight is true!" he clapped Silvain on the shoulder. "Let us march, my lord."

Then one man and another cried out, "Forward, forward!" and Etienne de Vesc held his tongue, and the King said angrily, "Forward, then. It is not I who fear. Why are we kept here? To horse."

Bayard took Silvain's arm and drew him away. "This was a mean welcome, brother. Patience yet and you shall shame them."

"I have done my part," Silvain said. "I am content. But I should have done nothing without you, Bayard." They found their horses and mounted. "May I serve in your company?"

"You serve who should lead."

Silvain smiled. "I have ridden alone all my days. I am no leader. But I would ride under the lilies before I die and I think I can serve France yet. You will need every sword."

"Your heart is heavy, brother. What do you fear? There are no troops in Italy will stand against a French charge. We shall win great glory of this host."

There rose up before Silvain a vision of Philibert's low brow and his little gloomy eyes and he heard Philibert's growl: "What has he won, poor loon? Glory and smoke."

Bayard looked at him curiously. "What is in your mind? It is not like you to go sad upon danger."

"I think of the men about the King. When I told you of danger, your heart was glad. But there was no joy in that tent, Bayard."

"It is true. They treated you vilely. Bad blood thrives in a Court. You have had evil fortune, Sil-

vain." He smiled indulgent sympathy. "But you will ride on lonely ventures. It makes you enemies."

"I live my life, brother," Silvain smiled. "No matter for me. Who leads the army? Not you nor I. Your little King? He will be a child all his days. He is in the hands of men who send him to war that they may fill their pockets."

"I must not hear this," Bayard said coldly. "This is treason."

"What, to say that Etienne's men are brigands? You heard them boast of it. To say that Etienne takes bribes from the King's enemies? The Marshal told him so before the King's face and he had no answer. Who leads the army? This knave at the King's ear who will keep the army dallying till the Italians have trapped it in the mountains and so earn his bribes."

"I will not believe you," Bayard cried. "Etienne is greedy and mean of heart, but no traitor. But what if he were? The Marshal commands and he drives hard. We shall march fast enough, have no fear, and the army is staunch. Name of God, there is no traitor can trap the army of France."

"I pray God you are right," Silvain said sadly.

"Why, man, there is no heart in you. You are turned to cunning and bitterness."

"I think I grow old, Bayard," Silvain said gently. "You have a boy's heart yet."

"Oh, brother, keep your loyalties!" Bayard cried.

One thing Silvain had forgotten, the desire of men to save themselves. What was said in council in that army was not long secret, and when the story of a league of enemies passed through the ranks every man was zealous to push on into safety. The Marshal had no need to drive them, though he drove hard and they marched through the Italian summer, ruthless to themselves and their horses, unwearying. They had cannon, unwieldy as guns were then, in the youth of artillery.

When the teams gave out they dragged those four-

teen pieces by man-power. Great lords took their share of pulling and hauling, knights who had counted it loss of honour to go afoot trudged in their armour that weary pikemen might ride. And the mass of the army laboured on up the steep broken tracks from dawn to dark, straining strength and will too.

"Do you fear yet, brother?" Bayard said. "We march like Frenchmen. Like Frenchmen we shall fight."

"It is an army," Silvain smiled and tossed back his fair hair and looked up at the peaks of the Apennines. "I wish I knew what they are doing on the other side of the hills. Give me leave, Bayard, and I will go and see."

"Let them do what they will we shall break them."

Silvain was startled. "That is a soldier's thought, not a captain's, Bayard."

"I do what I have to do," said Bayard coldly. "I do not think of the other side of the hill. And I have not failed in a fight yet."

"You are the most gallant knight of us all," Silvain said. "But see, brother. It will save many a life to know what they intend against us. Let me go."

"You try to see too far. You always seek to be wiser than any man. How often has that sent you on a lonely venture, Silvain? And little honour it has brought. Ride on with us and do your part when the hour comes."

"And so I will. Oh, Bayard, my brother, it is not my honour I think of, but the honour of France. Here is her army marching blind and we can save many a man for her. Let me go."

"Do as you will," Bayard said coldly. "You are your own man."

CHAPTER XXXIII

LONELY VENTURES

THEN Silvain took Thibaut and his two spare horses and rode on into the mountains, and travelling fast by mule tracks above the road they climbed on till there lay before them the green northern valleys and the dim plain of Lombardy. In the pass which comes down to the broad stream of the Parma they saw many troops. Some time they spent wandering on the high ground till Silvain had made out that the mass of the army of the League was marshalled below. "We shall never break through there, not though we were all paladins," he said. "And that is the road we go. Come, brother, there is always a way round." He led away northward across one valley and another where no army could march till they came upon the defile that goes by Fornovo, a cleft in the mountains dividing into broad valleys which opened on the plain. And there were no troops at all.

"By my faith, that gate stands open," he said. "My lord of Mantua has made sure which way we shall come. He is very sure!" And they turned their horses and rode back.

Dusk was falling when they came upon the army. High in the mountains it lay in bivouac marked out by a ring of fires that glowed golden and red in the gloom and covered it with a cloud of smoke that hid the mountain peaks. Bayard was riding round his outposts and Silvain called to him from far off and galloped on without a challenge.

"Good fortune! I have found you soon. You have

marched well, Bayard. I did not think you would have come so far."

"You do not think well of us. I know it," Bayard said.

"I think you are the finest troops in the world. But by my faith, this is far enough." He lowered his voice. "For you come the wrong way, Bayard. I have found the army of the League and they hold this road against you with all their strength."

"God be thanked," Bayard cried.

"God is with us, by my faith. I have found you in time. We must turn aside and take the road by Fornovo. They have no guard there. If we press on fast we shall win through and be safe in the plain. Bring me to the King, brother."

Bayard stared at him. "Turn aside, flinch from the enemy, shun battle! Is this what you come to tell him?"

"If you go down to battle in the Parma valley they will hold you against the mountains and crush you to dust. They are five to one and all the good ground they hold. I have seen them. Why, man it is no shame to march another road. You would not break your lance against a castle wall."

"Name of God, I have not learnt to shun battle because the enemy are strong. When did you learn, Silvain? What has changed you? You do not speak with your own voice. This is craven."

Silvain drew in his breath. "It is Bayard who says that to me! You have known me long, brother."

"I do not know you now. You are all cunning and fears."

"God help me, I must do as I can," Silvain said and turned his horse and rode on through the bivouac.

To the King's tent he came and there begged to speak with the Marshal d'Esquerdes. That bustling man, when he heard there was news would have brought him in to the King. "I pray you walk apart with me, my lord. It is your head leads this army. Hear me and

judge what you will do." The Marshal, well pleased with that, linked arms with him and they paced to and fro in the dark and Silvain told his tale.

There was none of Bayard's chivalry in the Marshal d'Esquerdes. He was a soldier who made war for gain and having gained all he could in Italy was intent on getting safe home with it. He had no notion of fighting a battle unless he could win. He had no zeal to fight any battle. He grasped at the chance of evading the army of the League. One doubt only troubled him, whether the road by Fornovo was a good road, and when Silvain promised him that they would march as well that way as the other, he chuckled and swore that Silvain was a godsend. "Fornovo for us, lad. We will be off with the dawn and march round them and they shall never see any of us but our dust. The devil speed them, we can outmarch all Italy once we are down in the plain."

He bustled off into the King's tent again.

Silvain turned to find Thibaut at his elbow. "How is it with him, lord?" Thibaut croaked.

"He trusts me, brother. He is for Fornovo. He has gone now to the King. He will have his way. He knows what he wants and that is to save himself."

"Pity me, so do I. We are not all Bayards, lord. That is a mad knight. But I know one who is madder."

"I?" Silvain laughed. "God help me, I am cold and cunning enough."

"Yes, lord, when you think for others. But when you think for your own fortune, mad, mad as the saints in heaven." He shook his head sagely and sighed. "What must be, must. But here is a knuckle of ham." He made it peep coyly from his wallet kissing the neck of a bottle. "Do not thank me, lord. Thank the good God who made me a thief."

In the lee of a rock they ate that stolen supper, and Thibaut lay down and snored to the stars. But Silvain was wakeful. He watched the King's tent whence no

man had come since the Marshal went in. The Marshal came out at last with half a dozen more and he was talking so fast and loud that none of them could put a word in, and the burden of his speech was that the Marshal d'Esquerdes was a great captain, and they would march by Fornovo and he would bring them safe off and a great captain was he. They vanished into the gloom and the clatter of his voice died slowly away.

"He has a will as loud as he is," Silvain reflected. "He has won. But he had to fight for it. He is hot yet." He sighed. "Alas, poor King! You have knaves to your friends. Alas, poor France! Woe to thee, O land, when thy King is a child."

Other men came out from the tent, not so noisy as the Marshal, debating whether he was right or wrong, and Silvain heard a voice that he knew. "Blood of God, he is a Marshal of France," said Gilbert du Marais. "Let him lead, the King has said it and so say I."

"The short way home is the way for me," said Philibert.

Then Etienne de Vesc spoke softly, something that made men laugh. But Gilbert cried out: "You are wise, my lord, devil doubt you, you are wise. You may be right for what I know and the Marshal has listened to rogues. But this is sure: the Marshal is to lead and we must follow. Heart of God, I ride with him though we ride to the devil."

"Well said, cousin," Philibert chuckled and there was a murmur of approval.

"The blind lead the blind," Etienne said softly. "Beware of the ditch, my lords."

They went their several ways and Etienne went with Gilbert and Philibert.

"What now?" Silvain said to himself. "Gilbert and Philibert stand out loyal to the Marshal—that is strange—and their patron prophesies ruin and yet

cherishes them kindly—that is most strange. What comes of it?"

Stealthily, avoiding the rings of fire-light, he followed them. They stood together awhile in the darkness. Then Etienne turned and came back to the King's tent alone.

Gilbert and Philibert strode on to the horse lines and Silvain heard the creak of saddle leather.

It was enough for him. He made haste through the sleeping camp. His own horses were far away by Bayard's outposts. Before he was mounted Gilbert and Philibert had a long start. He was checked by Bayard's wary sentries and lost more time before he could get leave to pass by a pretence that the Marshal sent him.

There was no hope in rousing Bayard. Bayard would never help him again. No use to give the alarm and shout that two knights had fled to join the enemy. None but the Marshal himself would dare act against the friends of Etienne de Vesc. To find him, to persuade him, while Etienne was giving a dozen good reasons why they were gone would waste the night. And they would be safe away and nothing proved or sure.

"Oh, Bayard, my brother, here is another lonely venture," he laughed sadly as he rode on into the dark. For he had never a doubt what he must do.

Gilbert and Philibert had declared themselves on the Marshal's side against Etienne in order that no one should suspect them of deserting to betray the Marshal. So Etienne could scoff at the Marshal's plan and when he was betrayed and the army was led to disaster, no man could blame him or his. A clever fellow, Master Etienne. In the hour when it seemed that the French had found a way to safety and left him no more chance of selling them, he devised a plan for their ruin which would enrich him and free him from all suspicion.

The Marshal ordered the march by Fornovo. Etienne who had kept the King loitering while the

Italians gathered against him would have had the army go into the Parma valley where the Italians waited for it. The Marshal prevailed, so Etienne was sending on the news that the Italians might move round to Fornovo betimes. Thereafter with his pockets full of Italian gold Etienne would boast that he had always been for the Parma road and that if the King had listened he would have brought them safe off.

Thus Silvain read the manœuvres of the night. It was certain in his mind that Gilbert and Philibert were riding straight for the Parma valley. He had to gain upon them half an hour's ride, he had to find them in the dark, he had to stop them before they reached the Italian outposts. One advantage only he had, that his days of riding to and fro had given him good knowledge of the mountains. That Gilbert and Philibert would go by the road, he had no doubt. No other way was easy or safe. But if he followed by the road he would wear his horse out before he caught them.

He turned away on a rough track, steering by the stars and the loom of the mountain peaks, and climbed for a high pass which the road forsook to find an easier way by a long circuit. When he saw below him again after many a mile the grey band of the road on a black shoulder of mountain he halted and listened and after a little heard the beat of hoofs. He had come in front of them, but they had good galloping ground before them and he a steep hill-side. He struck down on a long slant. They heard him, saw him (no help for that), and though they could not know who he was drove their horses on. But Silvain had chosen his line well, the slope fell easier, he came at the last in a sudden burst of speed and crashed into the second man shoulder to crupper and rode him down.

The other was well away while Silvain's horse staggered from the shock. The man on the ground roared, "Help, cousin, help. Stand by me. I am a dead man else. Turn, man, death and the devil, he is but one."

So Gilbert, spitting and swearing and struggling to get free from his fallen horse.

Philibert halted and looked back and turned and rode at Silvain, bending low in the saddle, a little man hidden behind his horse's neck holding his sword like a lance. So he rushed on, but Silvain going easily leaned out of the saddle as he came and his sword sliding along Philibert's sword held it off and went into Philibert's neck between helmet and breastplate and pierced him through and through and thrust him from his horse. Down he fell while his horse rushed on, and Silvain swung round upon Gilbert.

But Gilbert shrank from him, crying, "I yield myself. Have mercy. I am a knight and will pay a knight's ransom. Have mercy."

"I am Silvain de St. Lo. Come, stand by my stirrup, or I will cut you down."

"Silvain!" Gilbert cried. "Why do you set upon us? Name of God, this is wicked work. We ride out on the King's service and you——"

"What service?"

"Why, man, we were riding to find where these cursed Italians are marshalled."

Silvain laughed. "You will never find them, Gilbert."

"What do you say? God's death you will not kill me now. I have yielded myself."

"You are my prisoner. I am sorry for it. Hold by my stirrup. March!"

"But Philibert! Do not leave him for the love of God."

"There is no help for Philibert. He chose death, Gilbert."

Gilbert groaned. "Good St. Martin, pray for him. I have brought him to his death." He ran to the fallen man and lifted his head and cried, "Brother, forgive me."

Silvain walking his horse up to them heard Philibert

laugh faintly. "It is as it is," Philibert gasped. "Go your way. I go mine. And the devil takes all."

"Silvain, of your grace," Gilbert cried. "His breastplate bites into the wound. Help me with him."

Silvain swung down and raised the little man while Gilbert fumbled with his armour. "Name of God, he must not die in torment," Gilbert muttered. "So, so. Hold him a moment. So." And then he dived past Silvain, throwing him down upon the dying man and vaulted on Silvain's horse and dashed off into the night.

Silvain started up and heard Philibert's gasping laugh. "He is up and you are down," Philibert croaked. "What have you won? Come lie with me. The devil takes all."

Silvain ran seeking the loose horses in the dark, found one at last and galloped after Gilbert.

But Gilbert was far ahead and better mounted now, and though Silvain rode hard when the dawn broke he was above the valley of the Parma and saw far below a single horseman coming to the Italian lines.

Silvain turned and made across the mountains to the Fornovo road. He spurred the weary horse till it could do no more, then flung himself from the saddle and trudged on.

CHAPTER XXXIV

UNDER THE LILIES

THE sun was high and the army had gone far on the way to Fornovo before he met the vanguard. Bayard's men challenged him, then recognized him under his dust and let him pass. Bayard rode by without a word or a look. But in the rear of Bayard's company was Thibaut leading the two spare horses. He gave forth a howl of greeting and Silvain flung himself on a horse and galloped on to seek the Marshal.

In the middle of the long column of march the Marshal d'Esquerdes was riding beside the King. Silvain made his salute and turned and kept pace with them, but it was long before the Marshal could notice him, for the King was in a warlike humour that day: he had mounted his black charger, he had put on his gilded armour and his silver helmet with the black plumes, and he had to tell the Marshal how to conquer Italy.

But at last earnest looks and signs did their work. The Marshal shook off his Majesty and broke away and rode out to Silvain. "What the devil ails you that you come hovering over us like a crow?"

"I bring you ill news, my lord," Silvain said in a low voice. "Your plan is betrayed. The Italians will be ready for you at Fornova."

The Marshal glared at him. "Name of God, you promised me the pass of Fornovo was clear."

"And so it was, my lord. But there are traitors stand by the King. After you made your plan last night, two knights of the Sieur de Vesc stole out from the camp, Gilbert du Marais and Philibert de la Vire. And when I knew it I hunted them over the mountains and

Philibert is dead, but Gilbert saved himself from me and came down to the Italians at Parma. He was in the King's tent. He knows all. He will bring them to meet you at Fornovo. Still there is time, my lord. Halt and turn aside and make for the Parma valley."

"Make for hell!" the Marshal growled. "You are too cunning, my man. You know too much. Wherever we go you find danger. The devil take you, if we are trapped at Fornovo you led us into the trap."

"I have warned you, my lord. Turn now and go by Parma."

"Oh, rogue, can I turn the King's army as you turn your horse?"

"There is time yet——"

"Body of God, I will hear no more of you. To the devil with your tales. If all Italy holds the pass against us we will break through."

"I pray you, my lord, give me men to lead," Silvain cried.

"You? Go to the rear. Ride with the baggage. That is the place for you and your fears. Go, I say, I will not trust you near the enemy. You are too busy, my man."

Silvain turned his horse and slowly made his way down the column. Among the mules and the pack-horses laden with the King's pomp and the spoils of Italy Thibaut found him. "God comfort you, my lord," he groaned. "What is this?"

"This is my wages, brother," Silvain said. "I have failed and I live."

The army was smitten with convulsions. The Marshal and his knights and his squires raged up and down calling on the labouring guns to go forward, sending pikemen on, bringing horsemen back. It was the desire of the Marshal that the army should advance in order of battle, no easy thing to contrive on a march down the broken ground of a mountainside into a funnel of a valley.

Thibaut sucked his teeth. "My poor bones, we make haste," he said. "We are all tumbled and shattered before we have fought. What shall we be like after?"

"Pray God the Italians are hurried too," Silvain said. "That is our hope."

"Why, if they run at us as we run at them we shall all be as merry as peas in soup."

Once down in the valley the Marshal harried his army into some order and made a front that spread from side to side, though the boulders that strewed the ground and the torrent in the midst broke the line. Some way ahead they saw banners and the gleam of steel. The Italians had a long march to make from their old position and they were not rushing to the fight. Francesco of Mantua knew his men and his trade.

He had chosen his ground well. Where the valley opened out and forked his ranks were drawn up barring the easier road, ready to charge the French in flank if they turned to the other. He had already enough men to make a stand and more were coming up the valley, but all his force was not yet in sight.

"By my faith, we may do it yet!" Silvain cried as he scanned their numbers. "Here is only a morsel of an army. Forward! Forward!"

But the Marshal sounded a halt. Having room for a wider front he must make a new order of battle and fight by the rule. He spread his army out and brought up his fourteen guns and set them in the middle of the line and the weary gunners began a slow and solemn cannonade.

The Italians had no guns to answer it, but they held their ground and the fire did them little harm, for it was not in the art of gunnery to foresee what any gun would do, and most of the balls hit the ground before they hit the enemy and others went wide and others high. But the din was great and the smoke.

"Pity me, this is dread," quoth Thibaut, sneezing.

"Yet a merciful way to fight. I have seen an oak staff shed more blood."

"You will see blood enough, brother," Silvain said.

The Marshal having shattered his enemy's line by gun-fire according to the rules of art, sent his best horsemen to charge and break through. They charged well, but they found a stubborn fence of pikes and were checked and thrown back, and Italian horsemen fell upon their flank and scattered them.

So the fight went with charge and counter-charge, for the guns had fired off all their powder and shot in vain, and the French horsemen rode furiously but could not break the steady Italian line, and the ground was strewn with their dead.

Francesco of Mantua was content to beat them back. He ventured no advance. He kept his men in hand. He would not move his main strength from the ground he had chosen.

"This day is a long day, friend," Thibaut said.

Silvain was out of the saddle pacing to and fro wearily, turning with a toss of the head to look at the fight, tramping on again bent over the ground. Thibaut saw his face white and his sunken fierce eyes. About them with the baggage were more than the muleteers, lacqueys and men who had slunk out of the fight and there was a din of gloomy chatter.

Suddenly Silvain checked. "They have a captain there, brother," he said loudly. "He will hold us here till we have worn out our strength. And then we are meat for his supper. Here we stay waiting till he is ready to eat us, and there is the road to France." He pointed to the other fork of the valley across the Italian front.

After a first grimace of horror Messire Thibaut took his cue. "By my bones, it is time to go," he grinned. "We should be off with the baggage and leave the noble knights to fight it out behind us."

That noble counsel went to the heart of the cowards

and camp followers with the baggage. They began to slink off. Some of them started the packhorses. In a little while all the baggage train was in motion making off behind the army to the open valley on the flank.

Then Silvain flung himself on his horse and galloped to the fight. "God deliver him, he is mad," Thibaut gasped, but he mounted and followed after.

The Italians saw the long line of laden beasts labouring away, saw the plunder of their land being borne off and roared out rage and threats. The Marshal d'Esquerdes saw his men leaking away in retreat and cursed and sent a troop to head them off.

Silvain rode to the front line and found Bayard's company, worn by many a charge, drawn up under the silent guns. "Forward, brother, forward for God's honour!" he cried. "Look, they waver, they will not stand."

Bayard stood in dinted and bloody armour beside a weary horse. He wiped the sweat from his eyes. "You come late to the battle, Sir Silvain," he said. "I have no place for you."

"This is your hour, Bayard. God gives you glory." Silvain rode out to the front and he shouted. "In the King's name, charge! France! France!" and he drew his sword and galloped on. "Forward for France! Charge for the lilies now!"

"Great God, is he to shame us?" Bayard muttered. "By St. Denis, he is in the right! Sound trumpets! Advance banner! Charge!"

For the thing was going as Silvain foretold. The Italian line shook and shifted. To watch all the French train of plunder escaping them was too hard a trial for the old hired soldiers of fortune who made half Francesco's army, and the other half, young levies, saw a retreat begun and thought the French were beaten and the time come for pursuit. Here and there men broke from the ranks and surged forward.

So upon a shaking, ragged line Bayard's company

charged and clove deep and fought their way through, and where the golden lilies tossed into the gap they had made came the rest of the French horsemen by troops and squadrons till the army of Francesco was shattered and swept away, a rabble of fugitives.

The little King, more splendid than ever with his gilded armour flashing on men squalid with the dirt of battle, with his black charger prancing and curveting among weary horses and wearier men, came riding beside the Marshal d'Esquerdes to take the cheers of his army. But it was Bayard the Marshal sought, and Bayard was halted under the hill-side rallying a company many of whom were down, whose horses could hardly move for wounds and fierce riding.

"Here is the King to thank you, Bayard!" the Marshal cried.

"You have ridden well, sir," the little King said graciously. "I have always had honour for Pierre de Bayard. You have proved worthy. I give you my hand." And so he did while Bayard bowed low.

"Sir, he is the best knight that ever fought for France," the Marshal cried. "Name of God, Bayard, that was a grand stroke. You have the eye of a great captain. You took your moment, by God! That was the finest charge that ever a man rode."

"Oh, sir, this praise is not mine," Bayard said. "It was not I who led the onset, but Silvain de St. Lo. I pray you do him honour, for he has won this battle."

The Marshal frowned, the Marshal stared.

The King tossed his big head and cried out, "Who leads this army then? It seems I do not know. I thought it was the King of France."

"Silvain de St. Lo?" the Marshal growled. "Are you mad? That is the knave who brought us into this Italian trap. Why, man, he is false as the devil. It was he who set the baggage train in flight, telling the fools to save themselves for all was lost. Body of God,

if we are not betrayed, no fault of his for he has worked hard enough."

"I do not know that, my lord. But this I know, he rode to me and bade me charge and charged himself before us all."

"Why, man, because he meant to betray you too. He thought the army was worn out and you would fail and break and give the Italians a chance to come down on us and make an end. Charge first? I warrant he did. He was in haste to get over to them before I caught him." The Marshal laughed. "The devil give them joy of him! I think they will not be quick to pay him for this day's work. The knave had not told them how Frenchmen fight."

Bayard hung his head. "I am sorry," he said. "I am sorry. He was a true knight once."

Away behind him by the stream a man who sat beside a dead horse muttered, "You too, brother!" and scrambled to his feet and trudged off up the hill-side, and after him another followed wearily.

"Where now, lord?" Thibaut groaned.

But Silvain was murmuring to himself, "An offering of a free heart will I give Thee and praise Thy name, O Lord," and he laughed. "I have ridden under the lilies this day."

"What is for us now?" Thibaut groaned. "The more we do the worse we fare. Naked we end as we began. And no man is our friend."

"We go to win honour, brother," Silvain said, and strode on in the gathering dark.

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